



Elvenblood

His sword is cast by her chain.

The war is colored by his pain.

Wrath to earth, gashes to ashes, rust to dust.

藤原祐

YU FUJIWARA

Illustration kona

ELVENBLOOD

– Senketsu no Elf –

- VOLUME 2 -

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[Build Desks]



鮮血のエルフ

2

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Wrath to earth, gardens to ashes, rest to dust.

「私は戦のことはよくわからんや。でも……」

背が低く愛らしい顔立ちをした娘だ。
可憐な容姿、穏やかな物腰。

ふわりと柔らかい雰囲気を纏った様は、
まるで戦場に似合わない。

だが彼女の続けた科白は、
それの印象と
まるで真逆だった。

「さつき見た限りだと、
向こうは鬼が十五匹、
魔獣が三十頭くらいだったよね？
私たちがやるのは、
鬼五四に魔獣十頭くらいかな？
それくらい退治すれば充分だよね」

「さらりと
羊の群れの話でも
しているかのようだ。」

ミリフィカ＝ユララ
＝アストゼルレン

フリーム＝エイザ

カシュタル＝アベ

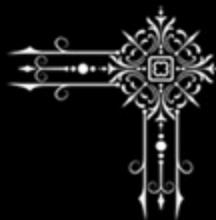
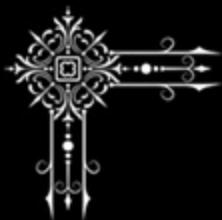
ペナ
＝ハイマティエ

エリス＝エンドヴェール

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Design by AFTERGLOW



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Chapter 6

第六章

灰縁を越えて翠淵に至れり

Chapter 6

Passing the Fate of Ashes, Arriving at the Green Abyss

It was midnight when the news of his death came.

From his death, over one week had passed.

To the south, the mountain range Mi Neu lay, overlooking the northern extremities of the Great Plains of Mi Lea – there, the staff officers of the Frontline Troops of the Elven Army had assembled at the Tent of Engagement.

The young girl, who bore the role of messenger, perhaps had turned ten. Even compared to the Elves, who as a whole were considered to be handsome, she had especially beautiful features. There was a lot of deliberate bodily exposure, from the lascivious silk that coiled around her body. That was a major preference of where she was raised.

Behind the tent, she let out a carrying voice, though she was of a slender build.

“Messenger!”

“...From where?”

After a few moments, pausing before he answered, a man in his prime of life made his appearance. He was a warrior with a grim face, and an eye patch over his right eye, frowning at the immodest girl.

However, that only lasted for a moment.

The man – Ji Tig Endveil – had a nimble mind, sensing that the messenger was property of someone else. As far as he knew, having a maiden of such a young age under one’s control,

“Nokt and Mikt, is it.”

It could only be those twins, those daughters of the poisonous flower.

“Yes.”

As her Chiefs' names were called, the messenger bowed her head.

“The contents?”

“It is important, highly classified information. For your personal ears only.”

Ji Tig looked behind him, glancing at the innermost part of the tent while shaking his head.

“Doesn’t matter. Speak here. Only the Clan Leaders are here.”

She couldn’t feel the presences of any other people. “It’s fine, isn’t it.”, she thought.

“Understood. Then...”

Unlike humans, Elves never utilise letters for the transmission of information. The reason for that is because when the contents of a letter fall into the enemy’s hands, it is a simple matter for the information to be leaked.

Especially if the state of affairs was that the humans were the enemy – as if a messenger could shamelessly be caught by a human. And, incidentally, if an Elf were to be caught, it would be too proud to confess – the chances would definitely be zero. “Compared to the chances of carelessly dropping the letter, the chances of it being stolen are much higher”, was the view shared by the Elven tribe.

The girl spoke the message that she had relayed from her Chief.

Before long, though it was a normal day, Ji Dig’s face became more grim than ever.

“...Is that so?”

After he had heard the contents, he nodded weakly.

“The message has definitely reached me... Please pass on to Nokt and Mikt that I will contact the others, including the bereaved family. Everything shall be carried out. As it is wartime right now, I guess that the funeral will need to be postponed.”

“I have heard you.”

Together with the answer, her lowered head bowed even further. When she moved, a scent of white lotus drifted from her silk.

Before the fragrance had disappeared, the girl stood up and returned.

“Then, I will get going.”

The environment around the tent was the profound “Elven Forest”. The overgrown, emerald-green darkness of the spirit grass and spirit trees which housed highly-concentrated spirit energy. As one of the Elven tribe, who were good in the dark, the messenger disappeared in the middle of darkness.

Ji Dig passed under the tent’s curtain while letting out a faint sigh.

He turned toward the young man who had sat himself down at the Table of Command – at the inside of the tent.

“Did you hear it?”

To the question, the man answered,

“...Yes.”

Their gazes dropped to the map of the Great Plains of Mi Lea that lay outstretched on the Table of Command, which was elevated.

His hair, which flowed like mercury, was illuminated in the flames of the candlelight, sparkling faintly. His extended, slender ears, lying down in the opening next to his hair, were red – faintly exposed by the steam from the candle. On the one hand, his complexion was white, resembling ice. His beautiful face, often mistaken for a woman’s, which had a shuddering amount of sex appeal, also balanced with his solemnity, which inspired awe in others.

“I heard all of it, Dig, my uncle.”

The young man who was the nephew of Ji Dig Endveil and the Clan Elder of the Endveil family, while simultaneously being the captain-in-Chief of the Frontline Troops of the Elven Army – Shirjis Endveil, nodded while wearing a neutral expression.

His emotions were impossible to perceive.

Him suffering could be sensed, along with him being disappointed too. One could sense sorrow from him, along with regret. However, at least – it was natural – he was not happy.

Anyhow, what Nokt and Mikt had told him about was the news of someone's death.

And also,

“Kuzan has... I understand.”

Because it was news of someone close to both Shirjis and Ji Dig.

Kuzan Demiendveil.

In brief, the young man was associated to the two, the Endveil Clan, by blood. Shirjis' confidant, a man worthy of being granted the name as one of the “Six Flowers”.

“It's an unexpected circumstance. Enough for us to suspect falsehood.”

Ji Dig muttered without thinking, while he stroked his chin.

That's right – it was unexpected.

Because he was one of the “Six Flowers”. Handpicked by the Endveil clan, an elite employed by the group named the Six Flowers; an influential, skillful person, who never had been inferior to the other members of the group.

Even so, he was said to be dead.

Yes, they had said that he was killed – moreover, in a fight with a Human.

According to the report, it seemed that he, acting arbitrarily and on his own authority, head out to the extremities of the front line, to a city on the other side of the mountain range, and was killed by an avenger while he tried to start something. That he had lost his temper over that the war over there was in a stalemate, was certain.

Did negligence invite that outcome? Certainly, there was too much self-conceit within him. He was full of pride about his “Common Art”, having a boasting nature.

Condescending humans, disdaining enemies, he had those bad habits. I thought that it was because he was young, that it was childish mischief that could be stopped with light rebukes, but it wasn't good enough, I guess.

Glancing at Ji Dig's pondering face, Shirjis responded with a lower voice than usual.

"Attacking as he himself pleased, it was really like that guy, wasn't it."

"Yes, that's right... That's right, I guess."

The young man, who bore a burden worth the Clan Leader to carry, faintly displayed his strong feelings.

The two were relatives, while they also where childhood friends. Kuzan was three years his senior. If one were to consider Shirjis, who had aged and calmed down since he was a child, the arrogant Kuzan, whose self-esteem had grown high through his sarcastic attitude, had been an existence similar to an older brother who was a nuisance to others, even if just a little.

It was a troublesome matter – Shirjis' eyes wordlessly indicated.

Just like when they had been younger, he had gazed at Kuzan in wonder from a distance as he pissed off the kids of his generation quite a lot with his cynical way of speaking. Or, perhaps, he yearned for the memories of that time.

Within his eyes, there definitely was sorrow that he had lost a close friend. However, that feeling lasted for only a moment. Shirjis' emotions had already been concealed because of his cool-headed attitude.

"They said that Kuzan did a covert action, didn't they?"

Not as Shirjis Endveil, but as the captain-in Chief of the Frontline Troops, the young man inquired.

"As it is information that those twins have got hold of, it probably isn't a mistake."

Therefore, Ji Dig also answered him as the captain's aide and not as his uncle.

"To summarise, that guy fought and died beyond the Great Fortress, alone. In other words... both that guy's actions and his end, must not be discovered by Lillithgrave."

If the Elven Khan, Radiaata Lilithgrave were to find out about Kuzan's arbitrary acts, the question of responsibility would, of course, fall to Shirjis. For the Endveil clan at the current time, that was a situation that needed to be avoided. It had been four years since Radiaata had become the Khan. The Endveil clan had through boldness and cautiousness established their reputation; unexpectedly losing their status because of this matter was not acceptable.

Though it, of course, wasn't Kuzan's real intention, it still had happened. Though he was a man with a disposition for danger, the feelings to other blood relatives remained the same within the Endveil clan.

Shirjis understood those feelings about the deceased.

"If that's the case, there's no problem."

Consequently, the mood became devoid of emotion, looking toward the future.

"The matters after this, along with everything after them, it's best to leave them to Nokt and Mikt. There's nothing we should be concerned about. We are us, and we should concentrate our effort on this front."

His lips did not even put together any mourning words for the dead.

That was because of the weight of the duties born by the Clan Elder, along with the strength that the young man held, while – there also was a part that did the impossible.

–That was why, instead, being the uncle, he sighed instead.

"Indeed... It still was too early for him to return to Mother Earth's spiritual embrace. What should I say to his father? I am pathetic. That I have let young people die before my very eyes, and so on?"

"It ain't your fault, uncle Dig. He was one of the "Six Flowers". That's why Kuzan's death was..."

"It's not your fault either."

Ji Dig bluntly denied him.

"Clan Elder... No, Shirjis. There is no need for you to take everything upon yourself. We

“Six Flowers” exist for the purpose of shouldering everything with you, do we not? We exist alongside you in order to share even your burdens. That ain’t a mistake... Therefore, Kuzan dying was his own responsibility. For now, that guy attempted to battle, and lost. That’s all.”

Shirjis slowly closed his eyes.

Tightening his lips, he breathed out deeply:

“I get it. Thanks.”

That beautiful face, which was particularly extolled even at the Country of Elves, smiled a little.

That reminded Ji Dig of his older brother, who was the Clan Elder of the previous generation and the previous king – Eiis Endveil – when he was small.

“This guy really resembles his father”, he thought. In both his face, his presence, his mannerisms, and his sense of responsibility too. Perhaps the shadow of his deceased father, who was similar to Shirjis, still could be seen within him. In order to splendidly accomplish the eternal role of the clan, just like his great father.

“Even so.”

Anyhow – the emotions were left behind.

At the bottom of the tent, Ji Dig muttered a semi-monologue to himself, while the candlestick shone down at the map of the Great Plains of Mi Lea.

“Who exactly could have done in a person of Kuzan’s level?”

Kuzan’s ability was certain. Even if it was said that he held pride and self-conceit in his heart, this was a tale told by the older people, like Ji Dig. Though, as a warrior, Kuzan was unmistakably able.

It’s hard to think that he was surrounded by numbers. What Kuzan did, was covert action, by operating behind the scenes. In other words, a surprise attack – there was no way to immediately conjure a large army, or anything like that. Assassination and poisoning approaches weren’t possible either. If that were the case, the messenger would have said that. The girl had used the expression “killed in battle”.

In other words, there was only one possibility.

He had fought normally and lost, against either one single opponent, or possibly, very few opponents-.

“Could it be said that he would have skill, even among other people? A strong man, capable of surpassing us.”

“One could say that.”

Shirjis stood up from his chair, turning his back from there, while he shook his head softly.

“Nevertheless... even it is a strong man, I must out-rival him. If I don’t recover from Kuzan’s embarrassing defeat. I cannot slow down my course of events for the likes of humans.”

Then-.

He continued, perhaps half-unconsciously, only through a small murmur.

“...Because the one man that can stop me is not here any more.”

Before Ji Dig asked “What do you mean?”,

“I want to change my way of thinking a little. I will take a walk.”

With that, Shirjis pushed away the curtain, and slipped out of the tent.

Afterwards, what remained was silence.

The faint, distant howls from magic beasts, which could be heard from the depths of the forest, were further emphasized by the silence.



The Mi Nou Mountain Range, which lead to the Empire of Mid Garz, spanned over 200 kilometres, over a mountainous region. The mountains which belonged to it were generally high and steep. It was a place where the mountaintops whitened even during summer, a place where safe overpasses were few.

Sandwiching the mountain range by the north banks, great plains spread out. The name of them was "The Great Plains of Mi Lea".

The size was approximately 50 square kilometres. If one was to look out, the horizon could be seen to become circular because of the open terrain. Regardless of that, no person lived there. The reason was simple – it was soil unfit for dwelling on. Nearly no vegetation grew from the naked ground, which was becoming a wasteland. It was a place scattered only with muddy wetland underfoot. The reason was because the Mi Shia river system that ran from the mountain range, which ran shallowly under the ground, en route to the plains. By hardening the ground, excavating water wells, and patiently reclaiming land, possibly even produce would grow. However, any amount of places suitable for living abundantly existed in other places. so there was no special reason to reclaim the land.

Although, if one were to read history books, it seemed to have been blessed, fruitful earth – paradise-like land that Beasts, humans, and Elves had shared. However, in the Period of Myths, a battle took place between the humans and the Elves – in the Elven War, large-scale battle was carried out there. Both parties had exerted iron, blood, and inorganic necromancy, cooking the forest and killing the beasts, spoiling the earth. On top of that, the spirit veins of the earth were severed as if they had worn out. As a result, it had become a place unfit to live in.

However, perhaps through the fate of passing time, the Great Plains of Mi Lea had once again become battlegrounds, through the Second Elven War. The Elven military forces, which slowly but steadily expanded their territory from the north-east, and the human military forces which held them at bay, glared at each other through the front-lines.

The Elves had encamped, and were in the middle of the Great Plains of Mi Lea.

The humans' encampment was in the mountain range, a place which was a natural stronghold; constructing a giant fort halfway up.

Once upon a time, during the epoch when the Empire had been in nothing but civil wars, the old fort had been constructed. After about two years had passed of renovations, it had become the first line of defence for this war.

Crowning the house name of the family which governed the Empire, Astzeelen. Said to carry the dignity of the nation, and keeping the Elves' invasion at bay, a resolute determination could be surmised there.

Then-.

The war went back and forth, the stalemate continuing – it was a winter day. One single girl of the Astzeelen Royal Family, bearing the same name of the Great Fortress, visited it, accompanied by few troops.

In posterity, that day was to be remembered as a historic moment.

The mountainside's altitude was high while the temperature was low.

The rampart, where hewn stone had piled up, dammed up the downwash, sending it back, granted that there weren't any violent winds – the coldness while walking through the castle was biting.

Therefore, when Milifica Yusala Astzeelen walked into the multistoried building in the heart of the fort, she reflexively let out a sigh of relief. She was relieved that it didn't cloud the air.

If one were to look back, all her comrades had similar faces.

The party consisted of six people including Milifica. All were young boys and girls.

Among them, there was a girl who probably had the most unsuitable character for the battlefield, with a timid manner – Laimi Selea-Shutimeryl, whose teeth met, chattering. Her round-frame glasses pitifully fogged up in an instant in the indoor warmth. It was probably necessary to procure something like a new, thick, overcoat, she thought.

About half a month had passed since the Yusala Drill Academy had been destroyed.

She had bid farewell to the days that she had spent as a Military Cadet until now, setting off with few comrades and passing the Mi Lou mountain range – finally having arrived there.

At the opposite frontline of the Elven War – it was the place with the same name as her own blood, the Great Fortress of Astzeelen.

The instant they passed through the door beside the tough soldiers which defended the back, the atmosphere changed. From the stone-built, unrefined, boundless outer walls of the fortress, one could overlook the Great Plains of Mi Lea located under one's

eyes. The multi-storied building whose maximum preference was that of robustness and practicality with not even one particle of beauty; the palace guards that stood side-by-side, emitting roughness and wildness, their hanging magical swords and magic wands emitting severity. They were completely overwhelmed.

And then, the party had walked though the multi-storied building in the central part of the fort, and were lead to the Control Room. The corridor, where small fireplaces doubling as torches were arranged, clumsily carried the heat, the laid-out carpet worn-out and tough. For every step that she took, Milifica's heart throbbed with tension.

If one were to speak frankly, the place's atmosphere was overwhelming.

Therefore, she spontaneously spoke to one of her comrades which stood behind her.

“This is what they call the battlefield, so to say.”

“Hum.”

Spoke that boy – Imina Haimatie, while facing the ceiling.

“Ah, well... I guess.”

He said, while he briskly stroked his dark-red hair, lost in a fairly indifferent mood.

Milifica was let down. The excitement was dampened, one could say.

“...That was a considerably half-hearted reply, you know?”

“That Imina and the others are like that, aren't you used to it?”

The boy with a large build, who was number one behind her, Fream Eiza, said with a firm voice. The mental strain when they stepped into the Great Fortress, was evident for both him and Milifica.

“No, not at all.”

Imina indifferently shook his head.

“Even for me, it is the first time that I have come to such a large battlefield.”

“That guy is different from us, he has guts of steel.”

The boy named Sashtal Dei bantered, with a faint smile.

Even here, Imina was in a state of relaxedness – fundamentally he would aimlessly roam with a flippant attitude, not fearing anything. Therefore,

“You’re the ones that are brave, aren’t you?”

Imiya knit his brows at those who had an amazed mood.

“E, everyone is awesome. I may be a little... uh, you know... useless.”

Said Raimi, who chattered her teeth. Even though she had entered the warm indoors, therefore removing the need to complain about the cold, her legs shook from tension.

“U, ultimately, we came here. We came to the frontline...”



She cradled a grimoire in her chest to the full extent of her powers.,

In addition, she had a carrying frame ¹ on her back, carrying a stack of books - however, before they entered the building, she was stopped, and had turned it over to the sentinels. She could have been anxious because of that.

“Raimi, it’s not only you, y’know. It’s me too.”

Because she was pitiful as well, she amusedly laughed.

“Uh, Lady Milifica”

“Naturally, everything is different from Yusala.”

Even though the Drill Academy was completely devoted to the unrefined design of utilitarianism, even the meaning of the word “utility” differed, as expected from the buildings that were exposed to the battlefield and their practice buildings.

“For this reason, seeing as you haven’t been a former drill student, I want to know what your view is about this, Imiya.”

Milifica once again looked at the red-haired boy.

Imiya shrugged his shoulders as if he was in trouble.

“However much you ask, as I said before, it’s the first time that I’ve been in a fort. However,”

“...However?”

After that, with only his line of sight going around to everyone,

“The building is solid, but it’s not like I’m swallowed up by it or anything.”

Behaving as if he somehow was instructing everyone, he spoke bluntly.

It was an excessively blunt reply.

That was why they knit their brows in disapproval, and unintentionally grumbled back objections.

“That is, because you, unlike us, have experience on the battlefield. We...”

“It’s the same.”

He said, with those interrupting, covering words, and a faint smile.

And then, his broad smile,

“You guys have already experienced the battlefield.”

He drove a wedge into Milifica and the other’s hearts, which had begun to feel suffocating with nervousness.

“...Uh.”

The battlefield.

The gruesome incident which had occurred at Yusala Drill Academy half a month ago.

Milifica’s trusted retainer had betrayed her, inviting in the Elven opponent, the drill students had been sacrificed en masse during that pitiful tragedy – however, they had, the Elf and the Demon, along with that damn Demon Beast, been at their wit’s end. However, they had been trampled down, only frightened off. The one who had fought in practice, and killed the enemy was,

“That was... Imina, you have.”

However, the boy ultimately shook his head.

“It is unrelated. You were thrown into the battlefield, and survived facing them. Therefore, don’t hesitate to something of this degree. Because however solid the fort is, even if the scale is large, the enemy will not change.”

He declared that, as if he was convinced.

“It’s all A-OK, Milifica.”

He said, so that he could flatter her.

The girl who always walked quietly next to Imina, nodded deeply.

It was a girl of a small stature, who formally wore a cloak. While covering her abundant, bluish-grey hair with a hood, she tenderly narrowed her cute, round eyes, and laughed.

“Everyone’s all right. There is no need to worry. Everyone is strong, and can properly fight... because even if an enemy comes out and there is no other way, Imina and I will surely protect you.”

Everyone looked at the girl – Ellis Endveil.

Milifica and the others’ tension loosened up and was smashed into pieces.

“Yeah, indeed... That’s how it is, isn’t it. It’s no good to be fainthearted.”

Their hearts had stiffened. Imina had driven a wedge into their hearts, and Ellis had swung down the hammer.

While their gazes met Ellis’, their cheeks unconsciously slackened.

Though it was from relief, it was also simultaneously in respect.

If she were calm, the girl would be the only one among all of them. Anyhow, Ellis was, properly speaking, the existence who couldn’t be there the most, in the Great Fortress of Astzeelen.

Within the hood, her bluish-silver hair was beautifully tied-up. While that was her appearance, said to be her modesty as a woman, she skilfully hid both of her ears – the pointed tips, a characteristic of the Elves’ ears.

Ellis was a part of the Elven tribe. As they were on the forefronts of a war against the Elven tribe, they could not afford to let her true character be known. Nevertheless, she braved the danger, and came there.

Disobeying her tribe, in order to fight. In order to be helpful to her most cherished existence, Imina.

That Ellis was laughing, and encouraging them. If that was the case, what else would they do rather than cheer up?

The situation where she – even more than anyone else – was to be overawed and

become hesitant, would certainly not do.

Because, as a soldier, in order to fight, the first necessary thing was, Milifica Yusala Astzeelen's resolute attitude.

"We are almost at the Command Room, Princess."

Without looking back, the leading Sentinel informed her, only his tone of voice being formal.

"Right, I understand."

The corridor approached the corner. In all likelihood, they would arrive once they had turned the corner.

She firmly closed her lips. Calmly taking a breath, she started to relax.

Depending on the answers of the person that they soon were to meet, Milifica and the others' movements were to be decided. To be turned away with an "It would be unthinkable for you to become soldiers", or being granted the idea to join the frontline?

That person's name was Dali Shukua Astzeelen.

The Duke, and the head of the family of Shukua, which was related to the Royal Family of Astzeelen, was entrusted to have the supreme command over the Great Fortress of Astzeelen as well as being the Supreme captain of the front line troops of the Second Elven War.

What was to be conducted with him were not negotiations. It was politics.

A conference between the two people of the Royal Family would, ultimately, be concluded there.

The first impressions that Imina held of that person was that he was a man of small calibre.

As the expectations were high, their disappointment was intensified. At any rate, the Duke was the person who was to bear the role of being the Supreme captain of the War at the front-line. They had heard that the military power on the humans' side was

about 30,000 man strong. If this was to be lost, the front would need to not only retreat back, but the likelihood of losing several important cities for the domestic industry was large. In brief, it was a war the the Empire staked its prestige on. If that was the case, it would be natural to imagine that the Supreme captain that was selected would be a great man, who held both brilliant merits and outstanding ability.

Nevertheless, everyone present greeted the man, who was plump and in his prime of life, whose haughty manner and menial smile coexisted in his body. The “Emperor’s Moustache” which had been grown on his upper lip did not suit him, which even let out feelings of absurdity.

In regards to the royal family, they would be exceedingly disrespectful. However, even if they were disrespectful, they were not in the least incorrect, which his first words made evident.

“Well, well, Princess Milifica. I sincerely appreciate your effort, for coming to such a remote place.”

As for him having the status of the Supreme captain of the Front Line, his first words were cynical, regarding the girl who was younger than him.

Honestly speaking, even feelings of disdain seemed to be held by him.

However, the person herself, whom he had thrown cynical remarks at – Milifica – did not return the malice.

“All hands, attention!”

With a short cry, they stood perpendicular to the floor, showing the back of their hands, their fingers extended, and their faces facing horizontally. It was a salute that was used at the Yusala Drill Academy, which was shown from Non-Commissioned Officers toward a Superior Officer in the Empire’s Army.

Imina and the others, which had lined up in the back, simultaneously followed suit.

Setting aside Sashtal and the others, who were former Drill Students – Imiya and Ellis’ salutes were hastily prepared in relation to them. The other party did spitefully not fail to overlook the somewhat mismatched, seemingly out-of-place movements.

“My goodness, how unsophisticated. So those are the prided subordinates of the

Princess?"

"...Though they are discourteous, my sincere apologies. They are not all accustomed to it yet. However, they are certainly reliable on the battlefield, and reassuring comrades."

"I simply cannot see that. Are the majority the same as you, Drill Students?"

"Former, Sir. The Drill Academy has already dissolved."

"Regarding never having stood on the battlefield, it's the same, isn't it?"

"No, we have already experienced it... There should have been a fast horse sent out with a letter"

"Ah, that, yeah, that."

Dali Shukua Astzeelen smiled disgustingly while he stroked his moustache.

"I have certainly received it. However, believing in that all of a sudden is incredible... Only you lot drove back the assaulting Elves, and?"

Before he was going to believe it or not, he had a tone of voice full of contempt.

"...What's this, I say."

As if he was unable to bear it, Fream, who stood next to Imina, softly grumbled. The others reflexively felt dread, but fortunately, because of his low voice, neither Dali nor the soldiers heard him.

Although, as one would expect, Imina was of the same opinion as him.

Why must his attitude be so full of spite? How come they didn't suit him to that extent? Was he criticising those greensters, who ignorant of how the world worked, fickly came to the front-line at a whim? Even so, he went too far.

However, the protests that Imina and the others had raised, only amounted to Fream's grumbling. All members bore their indignation and disgust, without showing it on the surface. Exerting themselves to stay expressionless, they kept on standing at attention.

The reason being, because before they had arrived at the Great Fortress, they had been severely told off by Milifica.

With a, “whatever happens in the meeting with General Dali, stay quiet, and leave it to me, somehow or other”.

Milifica said,

“I would like to implore you to please cease your malicious behaviour, Your Highness.”

Astonishingly, he did not become furious or raise his voice, but to the contrary.

“In truth, do you not already know everything? Since Your Excellency leads the Front Line Troops, it should not be unbelievable if the circumstances, which I have written in the letter, have been heard already.”

Though it was his appearance from behind, it clearly could be seen that he gently – laughed.

All of the people, which stood in the background, unconsciously breathed in.

It was not from amazement. It was the opposite. It was because they were overwhelmed.

It was at his courage, where within those feelings of tension, he insisted on cynically showing contempt to the other party, while he maintained his gentle attitude.

“I see.”

General Dali’s slackened jaw shook with a jolt, and his mouth warped into a pleasant one.

“Before one knows it, that bloody tomboy shows her skill.”

“I am but a scrap of the Royal Family. I cannot stay a young girl forever.”

Unintentionally behaving as a spoiled child, Milifica answered.

“By saying that you are but a scrap, you are too humble. Isn’t the princess’ right of inheritance far greater than mine?”

“That’s discourteous. However, for Your Excellency, who has piled up brilliant merits in this war, is it not but a matter of time for your rights of succession to be increased?

Again, within that gentleness, surreptitious cynicism was blended in with his words.

As they faced each other, General Dali forcedly shrugged his shoulders,

“Erm. Then, Princess, you too, especially, have a great need of accumulating merits in this war.”

Similarly acting in concert, he surmised that, with a suggestive tone of voice.

“Nay, that is an unnecessary concern. As I stated in the letter, what I ultimately wish for is to become a soldier and fight. With that, I mean that the sword that I will wield at your side will become Your Excellency’s sword. If we accumulate any merits in this war, they are Your Excellency’s merits.”

With an awfully inferior attitude, Milifica added a bow, with a bob of her head.

Imina, who looked at the chain of the exchange back and forth, finally noticed it.

The reason for why she didn’t let her other comrades interrupt her. The reason for why she, who had been swallowed up by the atmosphere until now, hadn’t shown her courage before the Supreme captain.

In other words, this negotiation was a battle without using swords.

And Milifica was used to fighting.

It probably was an indirect, disagreeable, exchange, peculiar to the Royal Family – no, high-ranking nobles. While feinting, awaiting the opponent to show its belly, without showing your own – finding out what way one could get to a conclusion and take the winning place.

The graceful attitude was a shield. The subtle sarcasm was poison, the words which caressed the other party were the blades.

This was no act for Imina and the others. Because the only one who could take out the opponent was Milifica.

While thinking of that, he could roughly see the reasons for why they weren't told, before that fact.

She had said, "General Dali, the Supreme captain, is expected to be weary of us joining the battle. Therefore, I must negotiate, as it is necessary for him to nod his head at us."

At the same time as Milifica took them to the front-line, she came there to get him to agree.

However, if General Dali was to refuse, he would like them to return if possible, if they were able to.

That was the reason why she brought out the story of the rights of succession to the throne. Concretely, people did not know who had the greater position in terms of the throne succession order, but from hearsay it seemed that Milifica's chances were higher than General Dali's.

And that seemed to be the reason for why he seemed to be unpleasant to Milifica.

If he were to be a nobody according to her impressions, he would not want to give out merits of war to those with higher rights of succession than him, and he wouldn't even want to bear the responsibilities from when she was looked after and under her command.

After Milifica had seen through that, she handed over her merits, tackling that problem.

And then, General Dali, who opposed her,

"Anyhow, that is a splendid way of thinking. Those feelings of defending your country, patriotism, I truly admire them... However. Nonetheless, as the Supreme captain, being entrusted with the Princess of Yusala is a headache-inducing problem..."

In answer to his assumed importance,

"Head of Shukua, Sir. My family name is not related to this. This is only my selfishness speaking."

The next matter – the whereabouts of the responsibility, was promptly tackled.

"I am 18, and my body has recently become that of an adult's. Whatever my father

thinks, the obligations of my speech and conduct are already mine only. Not to mention that it is wartime. What inconvenience is there, for a person of the Royal Family which governs this nation, to come to the front-line and fight? It should be the same for you, Your Excellency."

"...I see."

Once again, General Dali stroked his moustache in a disagreeable manner.

Somehow, it seemed to be a habit when he had realised his superiority.

"In other words, Princess. Do you have the resolution to, no matter what happens with your body, bear everything below your name?"

"Naturally. Such are the rules on the battlefield. And I shall indeed abide by those rules."

With a calm presence, Milifica reacted to General Dali's diversion.

Stopping the blow – guessing what the other person thought from straight in front of them.

"However... If I fall on the battlefield, the honour of that death in battle, will not be offered to you, Your Excellency. I would like to offer you my merits of war only."

"Even if I were to die, it would not be your fault, nor the surroundings." That she pledged there.

If one were to look from his side, the terms could hardly be more favourable from her presentation.

As for Imina and the others, it was a compromise to the extent of them wondering if they had needed to be there until that point. Of course, because it seemed like they were necessary, it was not hard to imagine. Perhaps, Milifica's social status – her title as Astzeelen royalty, the daughter of the house of Yusala, the dukeship – could be a burden for her, above what one could imagine.

At the problems which had been tackled, General Dali finally nodded deeply in assent.

"Hmm, I see... No, the extent of your resolution is quite commendable. If you speak to

that extent, it would be discourteous for a person like to me to stop you any longer. Very well."

"Is it all right for you to grant me this honour?"

"Yes. Your Highness, Princess Milifica, along with your servants, please wield your swords to your hearts' content in our army!"

While hitting his knees, and declaring that in a loud voice,

"Thank you, Your Highness. We are delighted."

Milifica said, reverently kneeling and bowing her head. Imina and the others also continued to do so.

While they fell to their knees, Fream, Raimi, and the others, exhaled in relief. Leaving aside their feelings that it wasn't necessary for Milifica to treat him with that much courtesy, they were finally released from that stress, and became relieved. In any case, the negotiations were successful, and they felt joy.

However – just before their gazes fell to the carpet as they bowed their heads.

The instant that they left his field of view, General Dali's facial expression changed, which probably Imina only noticed.

His smile.

It was obviously different to the haughty and menial smile tinged with sarcasm that he had shown until now. It was a sly and wile face, which smiled in delight as if to say "I did it!".

-What's with that guy?

Imina's spine chilled.

Those chills were correct, which became evident at once.

The Royal Family of Astzeelen.

During the 1,500 year-long history of the Empire of Miðgarð, successive Emperors had

appeared one after another throughout nearly half of it – 650 years – the Empire having the most famous tribe.

Those who were born as royalty, and those who were connected to them by blood, were to live close together in the light and the darkness, and the glory and schemes of the Royal Family, without any exceptions.

And then – Dali Shukua Astzeelen, who Imina had thought to be a nobody, still was a part of the Royal Family, and while he had lived to see months and years as a part of the Royal Family, Milifica still could not hold a candle to him, seemingly still a young girl.



It was the night of that very day.

Until the final decision about their posting had been made, they were led to beds and food, in the lodging houses for guests – to one part of the building which had been raised adjacent to the multi-storeyed building.

Imina and the others were summoned by Milifica, and gathered into her room.

It was a plain bedroom. The space was about four metres all around, with nothing more than a fire place and a bed, a desk for official purposes, and a clothing rack. Though a carpet was laid out, there were no other decorations. For example, if a part of the Royal Family were to come here, wouldn't it be a little too frugal, even if it was the battlefield? Was it the way of life of the Empire Army, or was it simply that General Dali's reception was poor?

However, it was better than the rooms that Imina and the others had. There, each gender was shut up in one room apiece, with no fireplace nor a desk for official purposes.

Everyone who was assembled looked at Milifica, who had sat down on her bed, first saying something in a frustrated manner.

“...I've done it.”

On the rough stone wall, the fireplace's flames, which illuminated the Her Highness,

the Princess' shadow, wavered.

"It's my lack of ability. I was too soft."

As soon as they were invited, she said something incomprehensible, as well as in an anxious manner. With a bewildered face, Sashtal Dei asked on behalf of everyone, while frowning,

"Nn, you're not calm in any way. Anything happened, Princess?"

His tone of voice was the same as always, to put it better, leisurely; if one was to deprecate it, it was a flippant way of speaking. However, regarding the place, his attitude succeeded in rebuking the other party.

Milifica suddenly smiled.

"I'm sorry. It was too sudden, wasn't it."

However, even so, the atmosphere clad in heaviness did not clear up.

"It's this... Please have a look."

Standing up, holding the sealed letter that was on the desk, she took out the contents and opened them.

Presented with that, Sashtal received it as the representative, and everyone peered into it from his behind.

On that short letter, a family crest-like, patterned stamp, with a rose and quiver, was applied.

It was a notice of personal change. What was written down, was:

"The assignment and rank of Milifica Yusala Astzeelen and her accompanying party, bearing the following responsibilities:

Assignment: Third Army, Second Division, Eighth Battalion 'The Order of the White Wolves'

Milifica Yusala Astzeelen: New captain of the Aforementioned Order

Sashtal Dei: vice-captain of the Aforementioned Order

Fream Eiza: vice-captain of the Aforementioned Order

Imina Haimatie: vice-captain of the Aforementioned Order

Laimi Selea-Shutimeryl: vice-captain of the Aforementioned Order

Ellis Ivy: vice-captain of the Aforementioned Order

Furthermore, regarding the Five names which have the Rank “vice-captain”, the contents of their duties will be completely entrusted to the New captain.”

“Is anything wrong with this?”

To Imina, it looked like a fairly ordinary notice of personnel change. Ellis’ name was properly changed to “Ivy” as opposed to “Endveil” – he was simply relieved at that assumed name, which was used in human society. Though it was different when they were in villages and towns around there, at the frontlines that the military maintained, the enemy side’s clan names could be well-known.

However, no-one answered Imina’s question.

After several seconds of silence, the one who opened his mouth was Fream.

“What’s... this.”

It was a low voice.

It was truly the same as when they had discussed with General Dali earlier during the day, the irritation when he had screwed around, earlier on.

However, the surprise and confusion which were mixed within his voice and words was beyond what had happened before. And, if you were to take a look, all members’ presences were dyed with anger and bewilderment, just like Fream, with the exceptions of Imina and Ellis.

“It ain’t a joke. Aren’t we new recruits?”, Fream said.

“I thought that we weren’t welcomed, but this?”, Sashtal said.

"Th, this... I, what should I do...?", Laimi said.

Only Imina and Ellis, who didn't understand the meaning, stared blankly.

As one would expect, he asked.

"Could you please explain how this is bad? You guys, why do you look so depressed?"

Fream raised his voice from behind, in exasperation.

"Oi, matie, surely you ain't saying "This ain't a big deal", are you? Still, this sure is an important thing, you know?"

"No, it's different, Fream."

Sashtal shook his head in a strained manner, his tone of voice differing from his usual flippant one.

"It's because Imina and his lot doesn't understand the organisation of the ranks of the army. Isn't it?"

"In other words, there's a problem with the posting?"

He asked again.

Though he descended a mountain in order to volunteer for the army, it wasn't like he knew everything about it. Fream and the others, who had attended the Drill Academy over there, were knowledgeable.

"Well, I will speak. In brief, this is what has happened."

Like that, Fream started to speak to Imina and Ellis.

"I wonder if that's fine..."

The reason-.

Ultimately, the army is a group of soldiers bound under command.

Therefore, in order to lead them, it is necessary to divide them into units to organise

them easily.

In the Empire Army, the smallest unit consists of ten squadrons.

Literally comprised of one group of ten people, so that whatever situation came up in times of war, those ten people can always fight together, cooperation in combat being mandatory. One person is appointed to lead and compile that Squad of Ten, similarly transmitting orders from above to the troops, and taking responsibility regarding their duties. As a class, the Squad of Ten is no different to normal rank-and-file soldiers, while the rank which the captain holds is that of a non-commissioned officer.

Gathered together, ten of those Squads of Ten becomes a unit of one hundred people – a Company of One Hundred.

Those which command this Company are arranged for differently from those who command the personnel in the Company of One Hundred. The person who leads the Company of One Hundred, is named a captain of One Hundred. Those who assist the captains of One Hundred, are non-commissioned officers, their ranks higher than the captains of Ten. Due to the progress of battle and the details of the tactics, the Companies are to be divided in half, of fifty people each, and moved as platoon units, the commanders, by convention, being the captains of One Hundred and their assistants.

Finally, multiple Companies of One Hundred are to be called Battalions, or Orders of Chivalry.

The supreme commanders of those, a non-commissioned officer – are either nobles of high standing, or people of many merits, which had repeatedly been promoted. As for those commissioned officers, it is normal to have multiple, exclusive, assistants, holding the roles of military staff and messengers. The Orders of Chivalry, private to the nobles, typically has, compared to the Companies of One Hundred, from two to seven times the scale of troops; if one only were to look at faces, the individual state of war and tactics, those Orders of Chivalry would be the largest units.

Naturally, depending on the scale of war, even greater units – brigades of 1.000 units, divisions of 5.000 units, and corps of 10.000 units can be formed, and those who command those units would become well known – their names would reverberate as heroes. In order for them to hold this role, it would be necessary for them to hold nobility, above a marquis' level.

Here, the total number of soldiers who fought at the Great Fortress of Astzeelen, is approximately 30.000. An unit the size of three Corps, a body of a large army, the size being on a scale that practically can not be seen, even if one were to look back into the history of the Empire. Since the invention of inorganic necromancy, the optimization of the army has increased due to the soldiers' remarkably increased personal strength, it is the first number of soldiers from the reduction of the army's numbers.

“In brief, that’s that.”

After Fream had spoken that much in one breath, while he briskly shook his head, the same facial expression, with intermingled anger and bewilderment, reappeared.

“I do not know how large the scale of this ‘Order of the White Wolves’ is.”

Milifica took over his explanation, with a serious face.

“Lord Dali says to me, that I shall take command of several hundreds of soldiers, from tomorrow.”

“...I get it.”

Finally, Imina understood.

Surely, this notice was – seeing that they were simply only new recruits which had come to the battlefield, not a joke.

“It is my fault. I looked down on Sir Dali. I never thought that it would happen this way...”

“As for the ‘New’ captain, it seems to be bad.”

While Sashtal held up the notice and flapped it around, he sighed, wearing a bitter smile too.

“In other words, this ‘Order of the White Wolves’ either had no leader from the beginning, or it was denoted with this notice – one of those two options, right?”

“In what way is it bad? Please tell me properly, now.”

In relation to this subject, Imina was completely ignorant, and could not even grasp the details. Therefore, he frankly asked the question.

Smiling and nodding, Sashtal continued.

"As an army, however much one is to tear off the arms and legs of it, what is kept alive, first and foremost, is the head of the army. That is the nature it holds. In a case where there is no leader, in other words, if they have been killed in battle, or thought to be discharged, that indicates the value of the group. Was the leader killed in the confusion in the background of the battlefield, or was the party so bad that the leader wanted to resign? Well, if the leader was of a depraved character, the former case wouldn't be impossible... Anyway, assuming command of that Order of Chivalry all of a sudden is a lot of responsibility."

"Because it may be a jumble of people who are good-for-nothing, you mean?"

"Aye... Well, there are different possibilities too. But, there is trouble in that. It's because the predecessor has been denoted and replaced with Milifica. If the former leader was liked, the soldiers will hate us. Even if that isn't true, the predecessor is sure to hate us. I guess, becoming, for instance, the same Order of Chivalry's vice-captains is probable."

-That's how it was.

That surely was an evil notice, full of inner feelings.

"Whatever we choose, it's not we'll be well thought of by the other soldiers."

Fream raised his voice in indignation and excitement.

"For a rank-and-file, isn't the boss is the one who you entrust your own life to? By one single order by the captain, you can be either kept alive or killed. Depending on the situation, you can die if you don't abide by the orders. To the soldiers, making the impossible possible is the leader's own trust and accomplishments. However, it's hard to say, but..."

"It's not necessary to be afraid of what others think, Fream. It's obvious. If looked at from the viewpoint of a soldier, I am but a young girl from the Drill Academy, who does not yet know war. Of course, I have neither any trust nor any accomplishments."

"But, we're the same as you."

Though he showed signs of agreement, Sashtal didn't become comfortable.

"If Milifica is a young girl that does not know war, we are the young boys who tag along."

She couldn't deny that.

The guys in the 'Order of the White Wolves' would certainly hold that impression, when they met them.

"In that case, it would be standard practice installed on an vice-captain of the Order. If our princess were to complete the assignment on the battlefield without a hitch like that, it would unmistakably be like that."

"...I see."

It would be out of the question for the people with high standing and royalty to be stationed among normal rank-and-file soldiers and non-commissioned officers; even if they were to be promoted, a a commissioned officer's standing still would be higher. One one hand, they couldn't suddenly take command of a location, nor perish in battle if it went wrong. Therefore, they took the middle road, making do with becoming mere decorations side by side to experienced commissioned officers – that's how it was.

If they had no talent, they would not become hindrances, if they had talent they would distinguish themselves – however it turned out, the configuration was good. In reality, there were many nobles and much royalty which had done so, historically speaking.

"I, I knew it... No matter how I look at it, this, it's weird."

Raimi said, with an uneasy face and a quivering voice.

"Isn't this left out from the letter? H, however much maliciousness the General has... It's, too cruel. It's impossible, innit!?"

With an "Isn't there an error in that notice?".

Hanging her petite head with round-framed glasses on, she asserted with a face that seemed to cling to hope.

However, Milifica shaked her head to Raimi.

"No. That is not the case. This is surely intentionally arranged by General Dali. I... I lost

to him. I mistook his objective, and I looked down on his skill.”

Regarding politics.

Milifica added those few words to what she just had said.

Politics. In other words, the conflict and antagonism of the fellow royalty, surrounding power.

That was transmitted to everyone in that place – finally, it was possible for the confusion to be settled, each time – that girl spoke in a simple way.

“Indeed, it would be strange if he didn’t think to that extent. What he was fixated on was, first and foremost, his status and self-perservation, that’s why he was the same as royalty... Nevertheless, my succession rights to the throne being higher than him, I thought that he would disagree with my actions. He wouldn’t want to carry the duties of such a person’s subordinates. If it were to turn for the worse and they would die in battle, it would also be a mistake. If by any chance they were to accept merit, it would be yet another burden, if he could, he would like them to return – he thought to that extent.”

At the conversation at the time, Imina and the others thought the same. He looked to be such a man. Because they were of the impression that he would be a nobody with a sharp tongue, a dull man who held both haughtiness and meniality.

They were wrong – it was an outrageous misunderstanding.

“General Dali was truly both bold and cunning. He aimed further ahead. And to the contrary of my compromise ‘If we were to perish in battle, our responsibilities will be our alone,’ he looked forward, his hand of cards advancing forward step-by-step, and he used it... No, possibly, I may have been induced to say that. He might have been waiting for me to get overconfident and be lured in.”

“You don’t say... The rights of succession, you mean?”

Sashtal inquired – yet again trembling in amazement and surprise.

“But, Milifica. You’re definitely in twelfth place, are you not...”

“Yes. General Dali is in fifteenth place. Ordinarily, if we were to think, the likelihood of

ascending to the throne is practically none, for both myself and him. However, some people among the royalty think like so: 'If I defeat around ten people or so, I can become the next king.' And General Dali... Was a person who would think like that."

Everyone just understood Milifica's regret and the gloomy atmosphere that she was clad in.

Not only Sashtal, everyone trembled.

"In brief, General Dali seemingly wants to kill me, if there is a chance."

The intention of Milifica, who said that she wanted to fight on the front line, was surely granted – as she was to become the captain of an Order of Chivalry.

However, the Order of Chivalry probably would not welcome her at all. On the contrary, they would look down on her, ostracise her, and perhaps be prone to shoot her from the background of the battlefield.

The promise that no-one would bear the responsibility if they were to perish in battle, was taken from her. These were the front-lines, the blood-drenched battlefield where violent struggles were made. It would not be strange if a commissioned officer were to perish in battle.

Of course, even if she were to escape the death in battle, the satisfaction and assessment of Milifica's leadership would plummet. If her assessment were to fall, she would be dismissed and sent back to the Royal Capital. And like that, it would be the final failure of the foolish Princess who, of her own accord, proceeded toward the battlefield and usurped one single Order of Chivalry. Her rights of succession would surely also be moved down.

"Pardon me, it's my duty. I erred in predicting this."

At that apology which was repeated a countless amount of times, not one single person answered.

Within that pensive atmosphere, the silence coldly resounded on the stone walls.

Of course, no-one blamed Milifica. Everyone was aware that there was nothing that she could have done. Even thinking about it after all his tricks had been revealed, after that "discussion" that was more like a "negotiation", no one could think of a good idea

for what they should have done instead.

Even so, quitting the participation in the war, and returning? Impossible.

Bowing their heads and asking to change their assignment and post? There was no chance that their wishes would be granted.

However, if that was the case.

The one thing they were to do – the one thing they could do, there was no choice to do.

“However I say it, it won’t be redone.”

Imina lifted his head, looking out over everyone, and weakly smiled.

“Prepare yourself for the worst, Milifica. This is your battle. There is no helping it if you lose your first battle, but it doesn’t mean that you’ll die the next time, right? Then, you’d better stand up and fight.”

–He was the same.

Even if his limbs were cut off, even if his heart was pierced.

Even if he was defeated and his home town was burned, his acquaintances slaughtered – thus, he currently lived for nothing more. As long as you live, you can fight in order to win.

“If you aren’t welcomed, make them yield to you by force. If they are jabbering, make them silent through your abilities. If they look down on you, glare back at them. Even if they shoot arrows at you from behind, everyone will protect you.”

Of course, it wasn’t like Imina didn’t have any feelings of irritation.

Even though he had arrived at the battlefield at great pains, even though he wanted to thrust his sword into the throats of the Elves at quickly as possible, he was obstructed by humans who were supposed to be his allies. Were the foolish things that had happened really good? Was it really possible to be superior in this war, when in a foolish tug-of-war?

However. Nay – for that reason.

It was impossible for him to lose the comrades who he had gained at great pains again.

“This is a good opportunity. No matter the shape and circumstances, you have acquired one Order or Chivalry.”

General Dali’s plans took advantage of that Milifica would perish in battle, or possibly that she would be overthrown within that war.

OVERTURNING that annoying scheme and getting the better of him was the only chance for survival.

Receiving Imina’s glance, Milifica showed a face that seemed to be troubled and amazed.

“A commissioned officer that that doesn’t know about war at all, leading soldiers who will shun me, receiving merits of war... it it? So that’s what you mean, do you?”

“Aye, indeed. That’s what I’m saying. However, it’s not like it’s completely absurd.”

As for cohesive power, Milifica had an aptitude for that nature. It wasn’t just her demeanour from her being raised as royalty. Her face, voice, and so on, all had the power to charm people, it was said. Though he felt a little ill at ease when thinking back about her face, which was just like his older sister’s – thinking back, Uruha too had such a disposition, where hers too mysteriously was liked by other people. In that aspect, their faces could be the same.

Therefore, if she demonstrated her abilities and showed the results, the people who accompanied her surely would increase.

Moreover–,

“You know, Milifica. Everyone too.”

Ellis, who had been silent so far, spoke, seeing everyone from behind.

Excluding Imina, everyone had a puzzled face.

That was because she was smiling.

“I don’t get much about neither the war nor the army. However, I think I was glad... about this notice.”

She looked at the notice that lay on the desk – with relief.

“Because our posts are the same. Because we have the same posts in the same unit. Because, that means that everyone can be together, even though we are on the battlefield. I’m relieved that we aren’t all scattered around, you know?”

Everyone was amazed at what she had pointed out.

“Ah...”

“...Indeed.”

“So, that’s it.”

“When you say that, it’s a blessing in disguise.”

Everyone unanimously changed into facial expressions that seemed to say that they had obtained salvation.

Imina took a glance at Ellis’ profile, and secretly smiled.

Because her words spoke for Imina, who was embarrassed and couldn’t say them.

In reality, this was a move that General Dali had missed.

When he had created the plan to advance in the Right of Succession, he hadn’t seen Milifica as a target. He perceived that Imina and the others were mere supplementary attendants and nothing special, throwing them into the same basket without exerting caution. It was natural. For instance, if you were to burn a criminal, there would be few people who would think to strip him and set aside the clothes. Even more if those clothes looked like rags. Even if the clothes were made of asbestos that surely would protect against the fire, he could not imagine the blade, hidden within the sleeve, that was to cut the rope of crucifixion.

“Milifica ain’t alone, and we ain’t alone either. It’s fine, as long as we can be together. If we all fight together, there won’t be any scary people, y’know.”

Ellis' positive words became hope and spread to everyone, sublimating into some kind of fighting spirit-like uplift. She had that sort of character. The quality differed from Milifica's cohesive power, but Ellis still had something similar – it was because they both were born and raised in a sovereign lineage.

“Ha, somehow the atmosphere grew enormous. I’m both scared and trembling with excitement, yo.”

While Fream’s face grew red through tension, he still clenched his fist and spoke.

“Some kids that just have left the Drill Academy, to control an Order of Chivalry that has ganged up against them? I’m laughing.”

Sashtal’s flippant tone of voice reverberated gallantly somewhere.

“I, I’m hiding behind you... But I’ll do my best, even though I’m behind you!”

Raimi spoke timidly, yet mustering her courage.

“Yeah... General Dali held us in contempt. I will make him regret it.”

Milifica looked over them, clad in some kind of roguish naivete.

All while Imina sensed that everyone, both male and female, were trustworthy.

“If that lot in the Order of Chivalry gets all noisy, I’ll silence them.”

With one stroke, he gripped the hilt of the sword worn on his back — “Exellis”, and bared his teeth.

“Slaughtering Demons and Demon Beasts, thrusting my sword into Elves’ hearts... Is this the guy that can do it well, on this battlefield? If that’s the case, I’d better do it.”

One could say that everyone’s anxiety had cleared out like mist.

Nevertheless, Imina and the others’ morale and determination was higher than their uneasiness.

At least for the night, there would be no-one who could disturb their sleep through fear. Even if they wouldn’t sleep, that would undoubtedly be through their uplift, for sure.



The sky that had dawned after the night, was fair, as if it was clear.

That was completely unsuitable for a battlefield smeared with blood; however, on the other hand, what unfolded made people realise that the conflict was completely unrelated to the weather.

Of course, Imina and the others had yet to go down to the battlefield, which lay on the Great Plains of Mi Lea. First of all, a rite of passage was necessary in order to acquire the qualifications to go there – even if it was disagreeable.

In one corner of the Great Fortress of Astzeelen, in one office within the walls.

There, the Eighth Battalion of the Second Division of the Third Army's Front Maintenance Forces of the Great Fortress of Astzeelen – "The Knights of the White Wolves", lay assembled, only in order to receive the just-assigned new leader.

It was a group of outlaws that seemed, at a glance, not to have one single ounce of dignity.

At a glance, the characters of the appearances that could be felt were few and far between.

A grim man with an unshaven face, who had renounced his care of them.

A military man, whose many wounds on his limbs and face made him look ill-mannered.

A gaudy woman who looked similar to a prostitute.

A giant, often mistaken for an ogre, with a ferocious countenance within his big frame.

A middle-aged man, whose demeanor looked more suitable for the position of a thief, rather than a soldier.

A girl with a sadistic appearance, whose hobby could be said to harass the men with her scimitar.

Indiscriminate even though he was in the battlefield, a man of slender build – his tidy looks being that of a cheater.

A boy with dull eyes on whom a menial smile rested, his clothes filthy-.

Within that bunch, the gender ratio was five to one. The rank and files were disorderly lined up far away, everyone glaring at Milifica, who stood on the bench of the military command.

What was put into their gazes was hostility and bloodlust, along with ridicule and mockery.

Even to Imina who was waiting in the background, it was painful. How much of the attention was at Milifica, who stood in the front of the military command; directly opposite?

Their feelings were that they had swallowed a bitter bug.²

The night before, they had investigated to some extent on what kind of force the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves was. Sashtal Dei snuck into a soldier's lodging house with a bottle of sake in one hand, and skilfully got some information.

Their reputation was terrible.

According to the soldiers, they were a group of people who were crowded out, a jumble of problem children, unmanageable, the final garbage dump for those who were driven off. Even if they went out on the battlefield, they wouldn't try to fight properly. They would go after the weakened prey that other squads had left behind, and present them as their own merits of war. Some would even say that it would be proper to call them not wolves, but foxes.

When actually seeing them before their eyes, the critique could be said to be quite reasonable.

Indeed, this was a group of bandits more than an Order of Chivalry, a crowd of robbers.

“I have been appointed to become the captain from this day. The name's Milifica Yusala Astzeelen.”

While the ruffians listened, Milifica raised her voice, passing well along.

“Though I have become this position under the orders of His Excellency the General, I still am a new recruit who has come from the Drill Academy just a few days ago. There

will be many places to where I won't reach. Together with my assistants, which are behind me, I will receive instructions from you, you soldiers of long military service, and I would like to acquire the strength appropriate for my position."

As a first greeting, it was not bad. It was not pompous, nor over-deprecating, and as royalty it was friendly. If it were a normal Order of Chivalry, an applause would occur.

However – whatever kind of greeting it would be, it still would not reach a person who was disinterested in accepting it directly.

There was no response from the group members.

In other words, it was negligible.

Assuming an applause was deserved, not even a single jeer or whistle was heard. Even though their presence was that of overflowing malice, they looked back pointedly, not even trying to meet her eyes. Having said that, it was not like any commotion had blazed up, as no-one opened their mouths – in other words, they feigned indifference on purpose.

Inevitably, an awkward atmosphere followed. Although, the only people that felt the awkwardness were the people here.

"What's this..."

Imina knit his brows.

One could feel that they felt unnatural in their conduct.

In other words, compared to their outward appearances, they were spiteful.

If they were that kind of people, they should have been able to raise their voices in crude banter and throwing stones, doing more of that kind of direct, bullying, behaviour. Rather, they frowned as if they thought of only doing that kind of method. At the very least, it was unlikely that they would intend to use those degenerate, ignorant means.

In other words, was it not like this idea didn't resemble their idea?

Wasn't it like they were following someone else's orders?

And, the one who had spoken the order-,

“You people are disrespectful, aren’t you? The New captain is meeting you. Do you neither salute nor applaud?”

It was certain that it was because of that man, who calmly walked out of the upper part of the gate.

“...Sir Amaïz.”

Milifica called out his name in a voice lower than usual.

“Why, I’m sorry, Princess. Anyhow, our group members’ manners are bad.”

That person – Amaïz Julieta, halted at the Table of Command, and looked up at Milifica, and shrugged his shoulders in a significant manner.

The new vice-captain of the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves. In other words, the former captain of the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves.

It was a young man of a high stature, his characteristic being that his smile distorted like a cramp.

His age could have been around 30 years old. His long hair, gathered at the back, and his tough limbs, were those of an experienced soldier – if one were to see only that, they would get the impression that he was brawny. However, from his facial expression that was full of scorn and his presence, the meniality of his insides revealed itself and was easy to see. Rather than fighting fair-and-square with a sword, he seemed to be proud to shoot a person to death by shooting an arrow from behind.

From then, the first meeting was one hour ago, but on that occasion, everyone understood that with a single glance. That that person was under the patronage of General Dali.

In an unabashed manner, he did not try to hide the rowdiness of the rowdy group members behind him.

“Well, please overlook it. Their manners are bad, but on the flip side their loyalty is high as knights. At the companions which I have approved, understand the etiquette satisfactorily, won’t you?”

-It truly was not a joke at all.

He unconsciously sighed. Though he understood that they would be harassed, from the very beginning?

Still, regarding the young girl of eighteen, would they really sit silently, stone-faced at the meeting in order to harass her?

An urge to kill nearly leaked out from the back of his body. The enemies of Imina were the Elves. The ones who he had to fight were the Elves who would come down from the mountains and camped on the plains. There was no reason for him to be quarrelling with other humans. Nevertheless, for what reason did they stifle him? Was the front-line so slow that one could not help but stand in the way of others of the same race like that?.

Just before his mind sharpened his line of sight, Milifica spoke, as if to hold it back.

“They are promising soldiers. The honour of our Empire, aren’t they?”

With a soft attitude, which ultimately was intended for the soldiers, she gave a broad smile.

That was what she, since she was very young, had cultivated – the ability of royalty. A mesmerizing smile which penetrated other people’s hearts.

“...Oh.”

A few group members, as if they were fascinated, looked blankly. There were also people who whistled, seemingly unconsciously. The amount of people who averted their eyes at the awkwardness was not one dozen, not two. There still, of course, was a majority of people who persisted in ignoring her – however, the still were, in that moment, aware of the young girl named Milifica.

Imina also regained his composure in her attitude,

It was all right, he thought. There was no need to doubt it. The princess was reliable beyond what he could fathom.

“...Judging by the current reaction.”

Sashtal, standing next to him, quietly whispered, with a subdued voice.

“It doesn’t seem like those guys will follow Amais’s orders like monoliths.”

“Aye.”

His line of sight without change, he too quietly responded.

“That vice-captain doesn’t seem to have the qualities of one.”

It didn’t seem that Amaïz had gathered enough trust for this group to completely pledge allegiance to him. It was probably through money, or possibly through authority. There could also be people who felt dissatisfied with following orders.

“It seems like many people haven’t come, right?”

It was just like Sashtal had said.

According to the documents that were handed over, The ‘Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves’ was supposed to consist of 342 members, all in all. Within that place, only about 200 people had gathered, at a glance. Following their orders and standing in line since morning; being treated differently than other groups was bothersome for them.

Whatever had happened, it was necessary to break down the current state of affairs first.

That was Milifica’s duty, and there was no choice but to leave it to her as much as possible.

Within the depths of the princess’ dignified voice lay a subtle thorn, addressing the vice-captain.

“Nevertheless, for these strong soldiers of long military service to pledge allegiance to me like this, it would be a cruel tale. Because for the members of an Order of Chivalry, the captain is the one who they entrust their lives to. To give up their lives to a young girl who just has appeared, knowing nothing of war, such a thing is so impulsive that it has passed recklessness.”

“You are quite right. Then, how do you think that it shall be done?”

Milifica responded to Amaïz, who seemed to examine her in order to evaluate her.

“How about you have the command, Sir Amaïz, as it has been entrusted to you until now? For all intents and purposes, I believe that it would be proper for me to learn about your work from your side as the vice-captain?”

“Erm. Surely, as you are a commissioned officer of noble birth, that would be customary.”

However – even though he nodded at Milifica’s words, he did not approve of them.

“However, are you not forgetting something, Princess? The one who has placed you here in this Order of Chivalry is none other than His Excellency, General Dali himself, through his notice. Someone like me cannot possibly understand it... I’m certain that His Excellency has some kind of profound plan that someone like me cannot possibly understand. I cannot disregard this, disobeying His Excellency’s orders.”

Imina’s anger had subsided and he started to snicker.

There were no words for this much hypocritical courtesy. He admired even the glimpses of maliciousness from Amaïz’s indirect manner.

“...In other words, you.”

Behind her gentle manner, she, sharpening her presence, retaliated.

“You say to me, that according to the notice, I must take command of this battalion as a leader to the end, do you? However, the group members do not accept me as it stands. In these circumstances, it seems like we cannot face war at all. Then, what should I do?”

“It’s easy, Princess.”

Amaïz Julieta’s corners of his mouth cramped, as if she had hit the nail on the head.

“It would be fine if the group members were to approve of you. Right now, right here. Whatever technique you use, it’s no problem. You may also speak only through enthusiasm, or you may bow your head and request this of them.”

And he threw that extremely coarse banter at Milifica.

“How about that you persuade every person one-by-one through their bedrooms? As someone as beautiful as yourself, there might be some people who change their minds, haha!”

He raised his hand while he spoke. The group members, united, roared with laughter.

“Those guys...!”

Fream, who was behind Imina, unconsciously raised his voice. Of course, he was not alone in his blood rushing to his head. Likewise, Raimi, who looked down, also frustratedly shook her fists. Even Sashtal, who usually was cool, wore a bitter face.

Possibly through Amaïz’s order, someone shouted from among the group members.

“Oi, she’s nice, I’m tired of nothing but cheap hookers!”

In response to that, jeering spread all around.

“Eh, feel grateful that royalty will service you, will ya!”

“Her body’s a little thin but her face is the best, isn’t it.”

“Ah, I might be curious about her wielding a sword.”

“Gyahaha, what sword!”

“Hey, how about the little sissy attendants help her?”

“The glasses are a little bit small, but the material ain’t bad.”

“Oi, look at the other side, ain’t there an outrageous woman there, huh?”

“You serious? The chick on the left side, take off your hood and show us, will you?”

He couldn’t bear to listen to even one of the voices that were raised.

“...Milifica, what should I do?”

Imina took one step forward, and asked at the back of the girl, who bore the full brunt of it.

“It’s different from the arrangement... Is it OK for me to silence them?”

However, she shook her head.

“No, it’s fine. I will return the current.”

She faintly looked back, and smiled.

And, immediately turned around – after a few paces.

“Amaïz Julieta, I inquire from you!”

Milifica shouted.

The volume was not so great. It was not related to the thirst for blood either. It pierced through the gaps in the mockery that flew about, which did not go past her well-projected voice. However through that – only through that, the half-open mouths of the shouting group members solidified, as if water was poured on them.

The jeering stopped. The atmosphere fell silent.

Before they were aware of it, everyone looked at Milifica.

It was not like she would be paralyzed from being overpowered. Within her presence, there was no sternness.

That was her “cohesive force”.

With her voice only, she drew the interest of the crowd of ruffians toward her. Rather than following the orders of their former leader, it seemed it was more fun to look at the tendencies of the new leader.

In the silence, Milifica continued.

“So this is the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves? Which you have raised up until yesterday, who have advanced in the battlefield with you, who have pledged allegiance to you – is this the state of your Order of Chivalry?”

“A... about that.”

Amaïz hesitated.

“A commissioned officer is the one who leads the Order of Chivalry, in waging war. The Order of Chivalry is what is lead, and what wages war. Both the commissioned officers and the Order of Chivalry are in the same boat, namely that the war that the commissioned officer wages is also a war of the Order of Chivalry. Then... This is the war that you wage? So, you mean to say that throwing vulgar words like stones at a young girl like me is the war of Amaïz Julieta?”

“Uh...”

There was no reply. Instead, what she heard, was the sound of teeth grinding.

It was natural, it seemed. He could neither affirm nor deny those words. Even if he were to answer yes; even if he were to answer no, Amaïz’s position would be lost.

The only one who could possibly stay cheerful here, was now Milifica alone.

Therefore, she came down from the Table of Command, glaring at Amaïz, and surveyed the group of ruffians.

After that, she glanced at Imina and the others-.

“The people that are here, are soldiers who are with me. Though it is a small force, it is my, daring, Order of Chivalry. With this small Order of Chivalry, shall I have you see our war from now on?”

“Wh, at...”

Before being asked what he were to do, his sword was pulled out from his waist.

Thrusting the tip of the sword before Amaïz’s eyes, she said bluntly:

“What you are supposed to say, is ‘Please let me see your war’. Where is the closest point of exit to here? Let’s make our debut, and through one single military gain, show everyone. We will teach you how a war of an Order of Chivalry can be any kind of war, primarily speaking.”

The atmosphere became as silent as broken ice.

Of course, not even Amaïz spoke, nor did anyone in the Order of Chivalry raise their voice.

Not even one jeer flew around. Everyone gasped.

That was of course because all of the boys and girls which accompanied Milifica wore deadly serious faces.

Without showing fear, it wasn't a bluff – but, they were indifferent.

It was like a matter of course that she, with only six people, was to make her debut.

“...Then...”

In order to comply with Milifica, Imina produced the Falchion which he wore at his waist.

Lightly shaking the sword with a slight wag – he restrained the urges to kill which were overflowing at present.

Of course, he did not display that on purpose.

It was in order to inspire the comrades who were to go towards the front-line.

It was a demonstration, facing the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves.

And, above all, it was for himself.

Imina laughed.

“I got tired from waiting. At last, it's the first campaign... Let's go and kill, to our hearts' content.”

About one third of the members of the Order of Chivalry reacted to Imina's thirst for blood with a jump; about one half of them opened their eyes wide, their eyes tainted with the colour of cowardice. Though it was only a few people, there were some who curved the corners of their mouth as if they were intrigued.

Anyhow, even among the cowards, there seemed to be some decent people – even if they were few.

Footnotes:

1. A kind of frame which is strapped to your back and loaded with stuff.
2. An idiom for not liking something.



Chapter 7

第七章

血痕と祝祭

Chapter 7

Bloodstains and Feasts

The front-line of the Second Elven War seemed to have become a stalemate for the last half year. By that it was meant that large-scale sieges occurred once every few days, along with small-scale scuffles, which happened every day. The reason for them was because the battlefield was becoming more and more cluttered, figuratively speaking.

The Imperial Army had constructed a great fortress, which stretched far across the Great Plains of Mi Lou, as a line of defence. In other words, if one were to look from the Elves' side, the conditions for their victory would be for that to fall into their hands. However, as it was protected by the Mi Lou mountain range itself, it was easy to attack from, a difficult strategic position. Also, as the Imperial Army's human resources were greater compared to the Elven Army's, victory was difficult to achieve.

However much the Demons and Demon Beasts raged, however much the Elves attacked it with mighty warriors capable of organic necromancy, the people who would close the gates and devotedly, single-mindedly protect it, were the attack power. From the other side of the mountain range, an abundance of resources were sent, with no sign at all that they would run out, even after six months.

For the Imperial Army, the conditions of victory would be to either exterminate the Elven Army which were in formation on the Great Plains of Mi Lea, or to repel them. Of course, that was not easy either. The Elves, who were overwhelmingly outnumbered, used the numbers to their advantage, employing the tactics to disperse the other side's fighting strength by scattering their own battle formation out on the spacious plains. And namely, their battle formations were named "The Elven Forest" – a small-scale Elven hamlet.

Even if it was improvised and small-scale, an Elven Forest was an Elven Forest. As well as the abundant spirit flowers and spirit trees, Demons and Demon Beasts also prowled, along with highly-concentrated spirit energy which hung in the air, poisonous to humans. If one were to enter, one's head would be spinning after half a day, after one day one's senses would become disordered, and after three days, one would die.

Consequently, it was nearly impossibly to cut one's way into the enemy camp.

From the battle formations that couldn't be broken, some Elves which held great power were accompanied by a select few monsters, and went on a rampage locally – facing this tactic, the Imperial Army had not yet discovered any effective countermeasures to it.

The Human side was enduring the sieges, which the Elven side had started, through their numerical advantage. On the other hand, the Elves made the best use of their advantage, through dispersing the humans' military force.

This battle, where both sides mutually both were thwarted at the strong points and jabbed each other at the weak points, resulted in a stalemate, shedding blood on the Great Plains of Mi Lea.

The war situation at the time was that the Elven side's siege forces just had temporarily withdrawn. Conversely, the Human side had broken through the Elven Army's battle formations from the outside, which lead to sporadic touchdowns and warfare.

In other words, local, spread-out skirmishes, were currently unfolding all over the plain.

When about eight hours had elapsed in the morning – the Great Fortress of Astzeelen's Eastern Eighth Gate opened, and four horsemen on warhorses ran off toward the plain.



There were four horses, while there were six troops.

Though they were a few too many people for them to be messengers, they were too few to be called an unit.

The soldiers who had gone out to the plain all looked at them, and made baffled faces, becoming wide-eyed at the girls, and those which made their way closer to them.

At the young girl with long, blonde hair, who, dressed in armour, lead the group while straddling a white horse.

Her beautiful features, which seemed to embody the very concept of "dignity" – that that kind of presence was on the battlefield especially caught people's eyes. As she wore her coat with a cherry blossom-coloured border and clasped the reins with an elegant stance in that empty land, she seemed to be no less than a role model for the equestrian arts.

Slightly late, young boys of whatever age raced at her left and right.

One boy of a large build carried a spear on his back. The horseshoes that the horse kicked out from the ground with were somewhat dull but wide, and had a thick and heavy feeling to them. In contrast, the other boy was slender, and of a small stature. While he gave a girl-like shadow a ride, he still, somehow, staggering, drove the horse forward.

There were also two people on the horse that was at the end of the line. The one who held the reins was a boy, and the one who had put their hands around his back was a girl. The boy was concerned about his dark-red hair, which was dishevelled, lengthened, and scattered by the wind. He glared forward, with excitement in his seemingly unfriendly eyes. While the girl pushed herself against the boy so that the hood would not fall off her head, she hugged him in a way that conveyed a strange charm. It was a mismatched group.

The horseman who was the vanguard was a noble, and refined. Though the equestrian arts exhibited by the two next to it were splendid, they were still somehow unsophisticated. And, while the horseman that served as the rear guard's posture was bad, and the horse inferior, it followed without falling behind.

While they caught the interest of the nearby soldiers, they headed toward their place of destination, which was the south-eastern part of the Great Plains of Mi Lea. From the Eighth Eastern Gate of the Great Fortress, the place was of the battle formation of the forces, a full ten kilometres away.

The location of the Elven Army, which lay scattered all here-and-there on the plains – while the unit that was fighting the single small “Elven Village” eased up the speed, they puzzledly turned their gazes against the approaching party.



At the report that a suspicious Order of Chivalry which was neither a group of messengers nor a supply corps was approaching, and at the report that they wished to meet him themselves, First Lieutenant Arinei Doha raised his eyebrows in puzzlement.

However, as he heard the name of the one who lead that party, those eyebrows drew a large arc, along with his eyeballs. Inquiring of the soldier three times whether they were mistaken of the name, and repeating back three times the question of who had mistaken the name of the royalty, he lost his head and went in haste toward the party.

While confirming her appearance, Arinei, as if he had forgotten his position, croaked.

“P... princess!?”

The girl, who stroked the white horse's muzzle, turned around and gently smiled.

“It's been a long time, Arinei... No, I should perhaps call you a First Lieutenant here.”

Though they had not met for over three years, it was impossible for him to mistake the daughter of the house that they had served from generation to generation.

“Aye, no... First of all, you seem to be of good health!”

Arinei bowed at Her Highness the Princess, Milifica Yusala Astzeelen, while standing at attention. Immediately following, he thought “damn”. Originally, he was supposed to kneel, but he accidentally had responded back with military courtesies. However, Milifica did not reproach him. On the contrary,

“Please do not treat me as royalty, First Lieutenant Arinei.”

And she saluted, just like a soldier.

“Princess...?”

“I am, at present, a civilian employed by the military. Just like you.”

“...What would you mean by that!?”

He was not told about those kind of things from the head of the family. Stretching back for over 200 years, the Doha family were nobles who were retainers to, and served, the Yusala family. Even when the war began and Arinei had received the summons, those bonds were not yet severed. He still, periodically, kept in touch with the head of the Yusala family, Milifica's father, through letters. He should have written about her present status – though he certainly had heard that she had entered the Drill Academy, the graduation would have been a long way ahead.

The opposite of the confused Arinei, Milifica calmly brushed him off to the side.

“I made you confused, didn't I... First Lieutenant Arinei Doha, Officer of the 'Order of Chivalry of the Wildcats', of the First Battalion, Second Division, Third Army. Would you be able to let me explain the circumstances of why I entered the military, and why

I came here?"

She inquired, her speech persistent; just like a soldier's.

"Yes, of course... By all means, please do. I have no idea about anything."

She spoke briefly to Arinei, who was nodding like a drinking bird.

That, because of the Elves' attack, the Drill Academy of Yusala was annihilated.

And, that seeing as she had narrowly survived, she was resolved to come to that place with her comrades, aspiring to become a soldier.

That come her volunteering, she had installed as a captain of the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves, a garbage dump of crowded-out people, because of General Dali Shukua Astzeelen's plans. Sure enough, as she was greeted with harassment in order to frustrate her, by Amaïz – the man who governed over the Order of Chivalry – she had gone down to the battlefield with her comrades.

And then, in brief, the close-by battle formation, the force to which her friend belonged, had been the "Order of Chivalry of the Wildcats", and she had come there in order to ask a favour–.

"A, and that may be..."

For Arinei, who had watched over the Princess since her early childhood as a retainer, the story came as a shock. So much that he was about to faint of astonishment, pitifulness, and resentment. However, what made Arinei even more astounded, were the words which Milifica continuously fired at him. She spoke of things that he doubted his ears on.

"For this reason, I am most sorry to bother you, First Lieutenant. Since would like to get a few Demons' heads from now on, would you be able to permit us to attack? Because, as soon as our business is finished, we will withdraw."

"Huh!?"

What a joke. Surely, she didn't go crazy?

That kind of disrespectful guesses passed through his head.

If one were to look, Milifica was accompanied by both boys and girls of the same generation. Of course, there were people younger than them among the soldiers, as

there was no shortage of ages, and seeing the clothes it seemed that more than half were students of the Drill Academy. Guessing from their manner, they had not yet been out on their first campaigns. The two that weren't in uniforms could have been mercenaries hired during the group's travels, so it was unlikely that they would be reliable in a place like that.

Of course, before that, the number of people also was a problem. Only six people – even though it was not unusual that a Group of Ten would be annihilated against one single Demon despite their efforts in this war against the Elves. Did she come here without knowing such a thing?

–Such infantile bravery.

Arinei bit his lips. Though he, deep down, was angry at General Dali's wretched plans, he even more than that scolded her ignorance and foolishness – he had to protest those virtues which she had thoroughly pursued. Being a tomboy was also, if it was excessive, a sin.

When he opened his lips as if to shout "How about I send a letter to your esteemed father", "Return at once", or "This isn't a good place for a child to be at",

"Milifica, as one would expect, we would be out of our league asking that kind of favour."

The boy that stood behind her spoke laughingly, with a faint smile.

It was one of those who were not wearing the uniform of the Drill Academy. His black overcoat was slightly dirty, and looked shabby. His eyes, which peered out from the opening in his dark-red hair were awfully sharp, emitting feelings of him being ill-bred and savage. And above all, even if the Imperial Princess was to be called by name as a joke, his attitude.

"Princess, who is this person? Have you, by any chance, been enticed by him?"

Though Arinei scowled at him, the boy was not perturbed at all.

"Been enticed, you say. Well, certainly, there's no difference."

"Oi, what's with that way of speaking!"

Unexpectedly, Arinei lost his cool. The boy completely ignored Arinei, who had taken a step forward and gripped his sword.

“Sashtal, Raimi.”

He shifted his line of sight to his comrades who similarly were waiting behind Milifica – the boy with a seemingly flippant manner, and the seemingly timid girl, who wore round-lensed glasses.

“Can you grasp the battle formation of this Order of Chivalry, and their situation of war?”

The boy – who seemed to be Sashtal – nodded, while stroking his fine hair.

“Aye, it’s fine. Before we entered the camp, I took a lap around it, y’know.”

“I, it’s not a problem!”

The girl named Raimi followed the boy. It was obvious that she was nervous from her voice which flew upwards, squeaking. However, the words that followed were enough to stop Arinei’s thinking through shock.

“Errr... The ‘Elven Forest’ is circle-shaped, approximately twenty metres in diameter. Our army is deploying a crane-wing formation ¹ in order to wedge open a gap! The enemy troops are large Demons, like Ogres and Orcs, which have come out from the forest and which play a leading role in the units. Though our army is slightly superior on the right wing, the left wing is inferior, and the encirclement is not perfect.”

Though her voice quivered, her words were fluid, speaking on without pause. The analysis was accurate. It was in line with the progress reports which Arinei had received a few minutes before.

Moreover, again.

“Here, it is preconceived that the right wing is to retreat temporarily in order to lure out the enemy while the left wing disperses, and the attack point of the enemy, made into reserve corps, is dispersed. Doing that, the right wing will roll over and be reorganised into a fish scale-type attack formation... After that, the faction which would cut up the enemy army, where the command would be in disarray, will shift places. While shortening the distance, what would be correct would be to take up the shape that would excel in defence – squares and circles, and so on – and bring them to a confrontation, right!”

“Uh...”

Her prediction was almost the same as the plan which Arinei had presented to the captain, who had come there before.

“Aren’t you reliable, Raimi. Even though I only heard that your tactics grades were bad at the Academy.”

The fine-haired boy wittily joked at her,

“W, well... Because, even if I only write down the conducted battle formations and outcomes in a simplified way, it’s not for real, is it not...? Furthermore, didn’t those questions completely ignore the season and weather when the wars occurred, and whether the yearly quotas of wheat were fulfilled, and such? In those tests, on those questions about battle formations and the development of the wars, I got angry and wrote criticisms.”

Of course, it amounted to a wrong answer. It was not acceptable for a student who had never been on a battlefield, to doubt the carried-out orders of the past days, and be opposed to them. It was natural that her theories were declared impractical.

However, if – that student had an eye for tactics which matched strategists from those bygone days, and if it had the knowledge. Practical orders were decisions that took into account the military power of both sides, troop morale, reinforcements, logistics, the state of affairs, the time, the weather, the quota of harvest, and so on – various circumstances such as those. And if she had previously become aware of even those circumstances that weren’t noted down in the text books through the history books and such...

After their student’s abilities had budded on the battlefield, wouldn’t the instructors feel ashamed?

“Raimi. After we take your current predictions of tactic into account, what is the gap that we can penetrate?”

“Aye!”

The girl vigorously nodded her head at Milifica’s question.

“Though what I said just a bit ago just is a prediction, if you proceed in the same way,

the troops would have to sacrifice not a small amount of people. The attrition rate of the left wing, which would become reserve corps, would be high – even when the troops are to attack and move, them finishing without losing their attack power or not is sure to become a bet.”

“I see... By the way, First Lieutenant. How are our options, which she just have stated? To what degree do our predictions differ?”

“That is, that... I can't help but say that it is correct, generally speaking.”

Arinei had no choice but to nod in assent, his face grimacing. It wasn't like it was “generally speaking” at all. It was like that – right up to the details. Even for an instant, Arinei was a man, a staff officer who was employed at the Order of Chivalry. Though it couldn't be said that he was particularly prominent, he was confident that he had a better eye for tactics than average, as a staff officer. A young girl who was an ex-student, had completely forecast – and even detected the faults of – the plan that Arinei had raised.

Raimi continued.

“Whether the bet succeeds or not, depends on the battle that the left wing has started – the notch that they have cut through. Even if the right wing pretends to retreat and it falls, the enemy's leadership isn't always disarranged. In order to reliably disarrange the enemy, the left wing must confuse the enemy, while scattering in order to disturb them. It is also necessary, to a certain extent, that they fight to the bitter end. Only after that, will the enemy fall apart. Chasing after people who run away, and forgetting themselves when facing the enemy... The integrity of the daft Demons is low. You should prioritise each and every instinct.”

“In other words...”

Again, after he had heard her words, the red-haired boy fiercely smiled.

“So, what you mean is that this war of violently cutting a notch is our, good, plan, you say?”

“Aye. If the left wing fails in its distraction, the forces will need to be killed by them and stall for time through that, retreat being impossible. In other words, the subordinates are made to carry the can. That's why, if we can, conversely, aid the left wing and prolong the melee...”

“The Order of Chivalry will succeed in re-assaulting from the turnover, and the numbers of victims will diminish. On that occasion, we can also take a few heads of those confused Demons that are bustling about... In any case, that’s the translation.”

Following the boy, Milifica wore a fearless expression.

And in response to her, the boys and girls who followed also, one by one-.

“I see, it’s both easy to understand and easy on the ears.”

The fine-haired boy shrugged his shoulders.

“But, have you forgotten? Setting aside Imina, it’s not like we are strong people with years of service, right?”

With somewhat philosophical eyes, he spoke, still not shedding his flippant manner.

“But, there’s nothing that can be done. I... I don’t want to disagreeably huddle up into a quivering ball and cry!”

From the depths of her glasses, Raimi narrowed her eyes in a seemingly-timid way.

“I will do my duty without fail! Fream, please do take care of me.”

With no feeling of retreat nor feelings of stopping, her lips grew tough, and tied together.

“To be honest, though I may not have the confidence... If I am made to take care of someone, I’ve gotta hold out, then.”

The large boy who clapped his hands as to inspire himself was the one named Fream,

“Well, from when we left the Drill Academy and came here, we haven’t just leisurely walked during our travels. Let’s pray that the experience instilled in us by Imina is beneficial.”

He held the magical spear, resting on his back, in his hands, and struck the ground with its tip, with a boom.

And, finally.

The girl, who stood rearmost – taking off the mantle's hood which she wore over her head, stepped forward, her bluish-grey hair glistening in the morning sun.

"I don't really know much about battle. But..."

It was a young woman who was short in stature, her features charming. With a lovely appearance, and a calm demeanour. A casual, gentle atmosphere seemingly following her, she didn't seem to suit the battlefield at all.

However, her words that she continued speaking, seemed to give the completely opposite impression.

"From what I saw then, there were about fifteen Demons and thirty Demon Beasts over there, right? We can do, what, five Demons and ten Demon Beasts? If it something like that, the extermination would be adequate, right?"

Without hesitation – as if she was speaking about a flock of sheep.

"Wha..."

Though there was nothing to fear or be amazed about, Arinei felt a strange shiver on his back. What on Earth was the girl saying?

-No, it is different.

Who are those people, exactly-?

From their presences and demeanours, Arinei felt a hunch. Milifica and the others held the confidence. The confidence, that they would win. It was not that they were looking down on the power of the Demons and Demon Beasts. It was not like they couldn't understand the realities of the battlefield because of their immaturity either. It was not like they were elated in a way surpassing stupidity; no-one raised a single rash remark either.

Seeing how the Drill Academy had seemingly been annihilated by those types of beings, it was impossible that those people would look down on them. For people that didn't understand the realities of war, it would be impossible to draw accurate tactical predictions.

Above all things – it wasn't like that innocent party was able to emit bloodlust like that.

That was it. What Arinei had trembled from, was not the young, silver-haired, girl at all.

At the same time that she had said “If it something like that, the extermination will be adequate”, the red-haired boy next to her had smiled.

Arinei thought that he just was a person of murky origin, a shabby overcoat coiled around his body – differing from the uniform of the Drill Academy. Someone who Milifica had picked up somewhere, a mercenary-wannabe.

Don't say those foolish words.

That guy was that kind of simple person.

He emitted bloodlust. As though that he had always held it down but that he could no longer endure it, the bloodlust tardily seeped out, slowly stagnating, resembling a quagmire set on fire.

Arinei had not seen a single person with such a fierce presence before.

He would not lose out among soldiers who had seen hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands of battles–.

“I'll do five Demons.”

Said the boy. As if it were a matter of course. And, as if he was longing for it.

“Everyone is requested to fight. Ellis and Raimi are to assist in the disturbance, and be in the rear guard; Fream is to guard the two. While Milifica takes command over everyone, it'll be Demon Beasts together with Sashtal.

“Hey, hey, ten heads with two of us, aren't you overestimating us a little?”

“If it seems to be impossible, I will assist you. However, I'm expecting it.”

“Well, if we it is expected from us, there's no choice but to rouse ourselves, Sashtal.”

“Innit-. Can't be helped. We'll keep at it so we won't die, yeah?”

Milifica and Sashtal shrugged their shoulders at those instructions.

For Arinei, even that was hard to understand. How could they calmly have a friendly chat with a companion that emitted such monster-like bloodlust?

“Well,... If we were to await permission from the higher-ups, the sun would set first.”

With that, Imina glanced at him.

Reflexively, his body grew firm. No words left his mouth.

If one were to think through common sense, their behaviour was simply reckless.

Besides, the one who spearheaded them was Milifica. Of course, as a commissioned officer, and above all, a retainer, it was absolutely necessary to stop them.

He understood that in his mind. Though he understood that-.

“Let’s go, everyone. We’re leaving it to chance.”

At everyone, who had begun to mount horses, he could only stare at them in a daze.

“Though I don’t know much about military regulations, you may be punished later on... At that time, do something about it, Milifica, please. Because you are the Princess, is it fine for me to say a few selfish words?”

“Please do not say those malicious things... Do you not know that I dislike that kind of conduct? When we are criticised, it’s not like we all will happily enter solitary confinement?”

“Solitary confinement from the first day, all of a sudden? You’re making me laugh.”

“I’m sorry, yeah? They would faint if they knew back home.”

“A, as long as I can bring a book into there, even if it’s a jail, it’s not especially...”

“Oh, by solitary confinement, do you mean jail? We won’t be forced to skip meals?”

They grabbed the reins in an even cheerful manner, and turned their horses one after another.

“...Princess, please wait!”

As Arinei finally regained himself, at least only Milifica raised her voice.

However, Milifica merely turned her face a little.

“Excuse me, First Lieutenant... If there is any punishment, speak to your heart’s content later!”

The words of apology and parting, were already said while she rode the horse.

They disappeared into the noise of the horses kicking up from the wetlands, and dissolved into the clamour which could be heard from afar.

By the time that they had sped off, the frivolous talk soon stopped, decreasing as the horses' speed increased. As the signs of the battlefield grew stronger, it could be surmised that everyone's mood grew tense.

Though he wondered whether to throw some appropriate joke to break the tension, the chance that it wouldn't work was still high – For that reason, Sashtal Dei tapped on his reins with his fingers, at the same time as his mount vibrated, in order to at least calm down his violent heartbeat.

Their cheerful attitudes from before was an obvious bluff.

After all, setting aside Imina and Ellis, the other three people, including him, were mere former students which had become new recruits. Such a mishmash of amateurs plunging into the battlefield and gaining merits? Those acts were just so foolish and reckless, so that even though they couldn't see the staff officers' grimaces, they could understand them too well.

Even thinking about it was fearsome. They were full of anxiety. Wouldn't they easily be kicked around? Would it not be an unthinkable shame for them to speak sharply, and jump out, barging into the battles that other armies fought, fighting unashamedly?

Honestly, he regretted it – wouldn't it be better if he had stopped it?

On the other hand, though it was inconsistent – his body trembled.

Since half a month ago, when the Drill Academy had been attacked by Demons, Sashtal couldn't stop trembling. There was no choice but to face the monsters and resist them. Though he also held a sense of responsibility as the executive, and feelings of worry about Milifica, he hid them to the best of his ability.

However, it was different now. He was just going to fight. And, he was able to do so, facing the battle. It was because he had strong allies, named Imina and Ellis. Did Milifica's cohesive force improve their moods? Both were greatly related. However, it was probably not only that.

“Hey”

Sashtal inquired from Fream Eiza, who was traveling next to him.

“Oi mate, aren’t ya scared? Anyhow, we’re finally doing it.”

“Of course, it’s decided to be scary.”

Fream’s expression was tough. Nevertheless, within his tone of voice, a wee bit of cowardice was mixed in.

“Well, there’s no choice but to do it. It’s not like I can fail because it’s scary, or anything.”

“I see... That’s how it is, isn’t it.”

As a matter of fact, it was just as he had said.

When you tremble with fear it is difficult to move. And if you can’t move, you fail. If you fail, it’s not only you who dies, but it becomes so that your friends will too. And what was most scary was neither the Demons, Demon Beasts, nor the Elves.

It was to die, and to let your comrades die as well.

During the last half-month, Sashtal and the others had always made an effort during the journey, practising fighting with Imina and the others. They were not only made to practice fencing. Meeting face to face, the six spoke thoroughly about that they could do. It was in order to grasp everyone’s abilities, strengths and weaknesses, and in order to think about what tactics could progress with the weapons, which used inorganic necromancy, they had on hand. It was in order to make their bodies memorise what positions they held when they arrived at the place of battle.

The most important was not to increase the individual fighting ability, but to multiply the total fighting potential.

Imina was strong. Ellis too; their strength was outstanding. However, while that was true, it was no good to only lean against those two. There was a need to become helpful to them by becoming skilful on one’s own. And, in the training which repeated during that half-month, they were told by Imina many times over.

“I’m relying on you.”

If that was the case, wasn’t it like it was impossible to not respond?

While being protected by Imina and Ellis, wasn’t it like they couldn’t afford to nervously overdo it?

“I, I’ve seen it...!”

Raimi, who clung to Sashtal’s back shouted, while seemingly biting her tongue. The “Order of Chivalry of the Wildcats” was, at the time, deploying its front-line troops into a crane-wing formation, while also forming a square battle formation with the forces in the back. Who Sashtal and the others had met with Arinei were the Rear Corps, or even further on, the end of the forces’ left flank.

From there, they went around, taking roundabout paths by horse, the route planned out so that they were to rush into the battlefield from the left wing’s flank. The battlefield was already within a stone’s throw away. What could be heard from the wind was sword fights, roars, and screams, while the smell of blood and entrails drifted about – unless they didn’t stop their horses, it wouldn’t become a distant view any more after a minute or so.

“We’ll keep going like this!”

Drawing her sword, Milifica, who travelled as the vanguard, howled.

“It’s our first battle! Though we might feel uneasy... if we can’t survive this kind of battle, there’s no point in going straight to the front-line!”

“Aye! I’ve already made up mah mind, you sons of bitches!”

Fream, who especially showed off his large-built body, showing off his spear.

“I, it’s scary... But! I’ll do my best!”

Clinging to his back, Raimi let out her version of a battle cry. Sashtal’s mind was also in high spirits, and he focused himself.

Though, his nature wasn’t one to talk big. That was why he, as usual,

“Well, I will step out... and do it, but only so I don’t die rashly, yeah.”

While he drew his kukri, his line of sight was fixed on the battlefield. The state of the battlefield completely came into sight. The rampaging Demons and Demon Beasts, and also the resisting soldiers, whose individual faces could be seen.

Before they had gone toward Arinei’s direction and done their inspections from a

distance, about four half-hours had easily passed. From only that amount of time, the situation of war had certainly gotten worse.

The enemy army's numbers were fourteen Demons, and twenty-odd Demon Beasts. They hadn't decreased by much. Regarding their own army – the amount of people was roughly one hundred in the left-wing unit. Compared to a while ago, it was about two thirds, it seemed. It had already turned into a melee, the battle formations having broken down. In other words, the numbers would decrease after that.

Though the right wing could be seen to retreat little by little, the enemy did not push on. It was just as Raimi had predicted. It was because the resistance of the left wing was weak, they were forgetting themselves, tormenting it.

That was a bad omen.

However – as for themselves, it was a good opportunity to establish war merits.

“Imina, Ellis! I leave the Demons to you!”

Slightly lowering the speed of her horse, Milifica called on those two who were in the back.

“It is more urgent than I expected. It's a good plan, to take the assault away by snatching away the flow of events.”

Instead of affirming her, the horses the two of them rode on raised their speed. They overtook Sashtal and the others, and lined up next to Milifica,

“I'll get that ogre. It's good to introduce yourself when a gap has formed.”

Imina sneered.

If only his face were to be seen, it could be called somewhat immature, or perhaps even a impish expression. However, his increasing presence was full of insanity, to the degree that even his Sashtal and the others, who were his comrades, felt scared. His characteristic urge to kill, from the resentment that he, Imina Halmatie, held toward the Elven Tribe.

“I understand... May the fortunes of war be in your favour.”

Without flinching from Imina's urge to kill, Milifica presented her sword to his behind.

“Ah, there was that too.”

Imina unsheathed his falchion which rested on his waist, and touched the sword blades together with a clonk.

And then-.

“...We’re outta here, Ellis!”

“Mm, Imina!”

Imina’s feet kicked the horse’s stomach. The neighing horse raised its speed. What they could see was about thirty metres ahead, was an Foul Demon – an Ogre, glaring over a partially-destroyed Squad of Ten.

The horse rode straight, and charged right into it. The Ogre, who had noticed its presence, slowly turned its head. At the same times as the intersection, Imina leapt across from his saddle, thrusting his crimson sword blade at the Ogre’s back.

The blade did not pierce it. However, it was not a blow as to allow the blade to pierce through. The aim was to use that impact as a trigger, therefore invoking the inorganic necromancy which lay within the sword.

A profound, translucent crimson, it was Imina’s beloved sword, “Exellis”. That sword blade was not made of neither jewels nor metal. It was hardened, highly-concentrated, condensed blood of Ellis, who was a part of the Elven Tribe. Blood – in other words, it was a sword made from an organism, possessing characteristics peculiar to Ellis, which could reproduce her inherent inorganic necromancy, albeit in a limited way.

Namely, that was the usurpation of spirit energy.

“Exellis” could, in part, absorb the spirit energy, which dwelled within the Ogre’s body. That was because of the engraved inorganic necromancy seals, which were etched on the sword blade’s surface, which changed it into the power of destruction. While shedding light, it coiled around the blade.

Somersaulting by using the attack to its back, Imina landed at the Foul Demon’s feet.

“Wh, at?”

The soldiers, which were engaged in battle, stopped their movement, blankly looking at him. The ogre could have been perplexed in the same way as well. Making its upturned eyes narrow, its deeply-split mouth halfway-open, it overlooked the human which had cut its back once – the small shape which just had flown suddenly. Nevertheless, it was still for a moment.

The Ogre immediately reacted to Imina's urge to kill.

“Guh, gururururu, ah!”

Raising its enormous, log-like arm, it swung its fist down at its feet in order to strike him.

However, that was a good opportunity which Imina had predicted. The reason was because when the spirit energy was entangled and absorbed, it couldn't bisect the ogre's torso. The part which could be bisected was the leg, and, from there – going three metres up, the head.

Imina evaded that one blow, which was as violent as a waterfall, by twisting his body.

“First of all...”

His movements of evasion were at their minimum. He placed his foot by the falling arm, and dashed up the Ogre's body. Treading on its forearm, he kicked its elbow pit, and leapt further, using its shoulder as a foothold.

“...That's the first one!”

He slashed at the Ogre's nape with his crimson sword, which glowed phosphorescent. Its pincushion-like mane, its stone-like skin, its steel-like muscle, and its oak-like spine too. Without pausing, the light of destruction bisected everything in one go.

The Ogre's head fell down with a flop. A heavily-spurting, darkish fountain spread the smell of blood to the surroundings. It lost the power in the both legs that held its large body, and the headless torso slowly crumbled.

As Imina landed, he stood up and smiled weakly, with sprays of blood which had landed on his cheek. Cruelly – happily, while intoxicated by the accomplishment of slaughter. The soldiers, who had opposed the cruelty of the Ogre until some time ago, muttered, dumbfounded.

“Ain’t, this a joke...”

Of course, it wasn’t only them. It was the same for the other units that had been fighting in the surroundings.

“What, just happened.”

“...The Ogre’s, neck fell down.”

“Wasn’t that, one blow?”

“How absurd. But, well...”

“So he offed it on his own? That little brat?”

Those who were at a loss with the Demon Beasts’ fangs, those who through their preparedness for death stood ready to die from the Orcs, those who restrained themselves at the Trolls’ groups through their indecisiveness. To make matters worse, beside the humans, even the Demons and Demon Beasts reacted to the vibrations from the collapse of the large body, along with the suddenly thickened smell of blood, and moved their gazes toward there.

The silence in the suddenly-open battlefield was torn up by the girl’s roar.

“Ogre head number one! Imina Haimatie killed it!”

Who started that was one girl – Milifica. Mounting a white horse with corpses of Demons underfoot, she raised her silver sword, showing her dignified presence.

Her long, golden hair was as smooth as water while she rode. Her transparent, azure eyes showed both gentleness and sharpness, holding a power of observation that seemed to allow her to control the area with one glance. Her graceful features being strained yet still slightly gentle, she made the onlookers tense up, while at the same time fascinating them.

In the battlefield where blood, entrails, and dust dominated, that appearance of hers shone in a different way. Sashtal, who came a little late, astonishedly stopped his horse at a distance. Even he, who normally was cheerful, was unconsciously captivated. Was it really possible, if one were to consciously behave like a noble, being in the royal family?

She was beautiful to the extent that she gave an impression that she was a goddess of war which had descended.

She informed them. Clearly, as if singing.

“My name is Milifica Yusala Astzeelen. With such brave soldiers under my command like Imina Haimatie here, I hurried to this battlefield for a certain reason.”

Astzeelen. If it was among the citizens of the Empire, it was an echo of the king which no-one would not know. Again, for the soldiers, there was the name of the Great Fortress within the mountain range in the background. In other words, everyone who were there, were fighting under her flag.

Through only introducing herself, Milifica made it known to her surroundings.

And, in addition-.

“Furthermore, from today, I have taken up the post of captain of the Second Division, Eighth Battalion ‘The Order of the White Wolves’. Though we are a small force in numbers, us six elites of the “Order of the White Wolves” – would you please be able to approve us to fight jointly with you, you of the left-wing unit of the same-division, Second Battalion “Chivalric Order of the Wildcats”? If we’re not a hindrance, please let us fight together with you!”

“Oh... We could wish for nothing better”

What someone mumbled, spoke for the feelings of everyone who had heard her words. The faces of the soldiers were full of exaltation.

Originally, soldiers affiliated with someone else entering a battlefield and dividing it deviated from the customs of war. It increased the possibility of the command being thrown out of order, the obstruction of the execution of tactics, and also the interception of merits of war.

-From the beginning, in outline, it was the very best of places.

There were many advantageous hands to be played. Milifica was royalty – she was of a social position where no-one could complain even if she was a little selfish. She was endowed with her cohesive force. And, that left-wing unit had a relatively small number of people – it consisted of about a Company of One Hundred.

The one who would command a Company of One Hundred was a non-commissioned officer, and in terms of rank, that would be a sergeant major or a sergeant. Though Milifica was a captain that had been forced to command, an Order of Chivalry, she was given the rank of Captain. Captain, and moreover, one could not simply stop a person of the Royal Family from personally applying for assistance through one's own discretion.

To say nothing of that they were under melee warfare. It was possible that no-one knew where the captains of One Hundred were. Even if they would, it would be impossible to go to each and every superior officer and apply for permission, in a battlefield which would not allow predictions of the war situation. If one were to coercively have a face that seemed to say "Of course" and push through, any amount of explanations would arise afterwards.

The purpose of that was to demonstrate their power to that disgusting former leader, and to the bastards in the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves, and as proof, only a few demons' heads were necessary. Though it, as a result, could assist in the victory of not only the left-wing unit but also the Order of Chivalry of the Wildcats; ultimately, help was help.

It could be said that they were setting up the table. Imina had succeeded with the assault while Milifica prodded at the gap, securing the place. Therefore, Sashtal and the others would do it to the end, only to the extent as to not mess up. Without working themselves up, they relaxed – so that they could achieve the results of their training.

"Raimi, get ready."

"A, aye!"

Urging the girl on the behind, they both dismounted. Giving the horse who had supported them until now a single pat, it ran away, encouraged. Though it, to be honest, would be better if the horse were to leave when returning home – it would be difficult to make it stay there, as expected of a horse.

"Please wait!"

Nearly at the same time as Sashtal and the others' horse run off, another one came running. It was Ellis. After only Imina had jumped off the horse in assault, she had returned instead, grasping the reins herself.

Thus, everyone, six names in total, re-united on the battlefield.

Milifica, as the captain, mounted a white horse, showing off her existence. And behind her, Sashtal and Raimi stood on the ground with their own feet. In order to settle down at both sides, Fream and Ellis calmed down their horses. And, the one who relaxedly stood in front, standing ready, laughing with an intent to kill, their maximum strength, the key of attacking – Imina.

“Then, let’s get started.”

Formally waving her knight sword, Milifica radiantly exclaimed.

“All hands... Commence battle!”



Raimi Selea-Shutimeryl was born into a former-noble, now-commoner, middle-class family.

Though they, until her grandfather’s generation, had been bestowed with the rank of Viscount, and taken up residence in the royal capital, her father seemed to have fallen when she was about three years of age. The cause seemed to be that because the head of the family, Raimi’s grandfather, was doing military service, an unthinkable blunder happened with the savage tribes of the South.

She didn’t know so well what kind of blunder it was. However, consequentially, Raimi’s family had, when she was born, already let their residence go, had denounced their nobility. They moved from the royal capital to an ordinary city in the countryside, living normally as commoners.

However – though the event had happened before she was born, it wasn’t a story that didn’t relate to her.

Her grandfather’s generation was only about thirty years ago. Raimi was raised together with the remnants of the court rank that the Selea-Shutimeryl family had held. If it was used steadily, there was a fortune that would not be completely consumed for about twenty years or so; there was a house, that while it wouldn’t be called extravagant, was large. The air in the family was such that one would not forget the glory of olden days, influenced by her grandfather’s words and deeds. And, stored

in her grandfather's library, there were a great number of books.

It was said that the children in the residence that lay on the hill were kept at a distance from the children in the city, as her grandfather always had held the expectation that she someday would bloom a second time as a noble and become a person of importance, and that was why it was unavoidable for her to, in order to flee from those expectations, seclude herself in the library every day, reading a large amount of books day after day.

Her entering the Yusala Drill Academy was also because of her grandfather's intentions:

"When you leave the Drill Academy and appoint yourself at the battlefield, if you are to achieve merits, a court rank will be bestowed on you as a reward and you will become well known. That's why, for the sake of your country, make yourself well known."

Her parents did not oppose those troublesome views either. And Raimi could not say herself that it was unpleasant, because of her naturally timid nature. However, she felt that it was unreasonable, in the depths of her heart. Because, wasn't it a ridiculous story? Why was the grandchild of the person who had blundered in war and stripped away the court rank to receive one again through deeds of arms, in war?

Because she had neither the willingness nor the ability, she did not do her best in the lectures. In the classroom, she couldn't write the answers that the lecturer wished for without it interfering with the knowledge that she had learned, and in the practicals she couldn't wield a sword at all, nor fire a bow. However, within the Academy's library there were dozens of times more books than what she had at home, and she was only devoted to be absorbed in them.

Before long, it was rumoured that there was a schoolgirl with bad grades, that despite that did nothing but read books, and she started to be ridiculed as "De-dusting Raimi". Ultimately, when she looked back from when she was in her home town, and understood that nothing had changed – she obtained a chance to speak with the representative of the Drill Academy, Milifica.

Milifica was searching for a history book in the library. Because her degree of familiarity was low, she didn't even seem to know where the librarian was. Because she had read that book by chance, Raimi led the way. Because she remembered that the writer's point of view was peculiar, making the book difficult to read, she also

recommended supplementary books that were in the surroundings. And then, she was very admired and congratulated – graciously to the extent of it being wasteful.

She was told that she was praiseworthy. She studied from many more books, and was admired, being told “Please make use of your knowledge for this country.” She, who could not at all do classroom learning nor the practicals. She, who could not do anything else other than read books. She, who had descended from an incompetent grandfather, an incompetent grandchild.

And, at present, Raimi was standing on the battlefield. With Her Highness Milifica, the Princess, who had acknowledged her for the first time since birth – as her comrade. She still didn’t know what her grandfather had done when he had blundered. She thought that it was inconsequential. She had no interest in taking back the days of glory which he wanted.

It was not for that reason that she was standing there.

Hearing Milifica’s orders, she took a deep breath.

And she picked up the book that was suspended from her waist. A grimoire, it was called. Seals of the inorganic necromancy were written down on paper with special ink, and were bundled together and bound into the shape of a book. It was invented in the earlier days when inorganic necromancy had just first been discovered, but soon became obsolete because of its low usefulness. Now, it had become a weapon that no-one looked back on, a weapon buried in history – which somehow reflected her. As such, it was very suitable for her.

She supported its back with her left hand, opened it, and turned the page with her right hand. They were movements that she had repeated almost daily since she was very young. She moved her fingers fluently, even in the battlefield’s tension.

First of all, she checked page 156. What was written down there was a inorganic necromancy of fire. She grasped the page and pulled it out from it’s binding,

“Ellis, please! Delay, five seconds!”

She presented it, and spoke to, Ellis Endveil, who was riding her horse next to her.

“Yes!”

While readying the bow that she carried on her back, Ellis received the piece of paper. At the same time, pulling out one arrow from the quiver which lay fastened to the horse's saddle, she passed the arrowhead through the top of the paper.

“...Ogre on our front-left, twenty metres ahead!”

Following the instructions that Raimi had announced, she nocked the bow and shot the arrow.

The arrow, with a piece of paper attached to it, flew unstably in the wind. However, the only thing that was dangerous was its appearance – it was twenty metres ahead of Raimi and the others, raging on against the Squad of Ten which were its opponents, the Ogre's right eye was magnificently pierced through. Immediately following, the grimoire's flame arts inorganic necromancy was invoked.

“Gu, wooah!?”

Its pierced eyeball finally enveloped its head in flames, and the Ogre writhed in pain. Of course, that extent would not be enough to rob the robust Demon of its life. But, at least it was no longer able to fight, and it had lost the margin it had from the humans, that were its opponents, which surrounded it from a distance, crowding it.

“Now, soldiers!”, Raimi shouted as loud as she could.

Whether it reached them was unknown. However, every person in the Squad of Ten which was behind the Ogre bowed their heads collectively in assent, preparing and fixing their battle foundation, attacking as an enclosure and commencing battle. At once, one person succeeded in severing the tendon of one leg, and the Demon's large build fell on its knees. It was not necessary for it to be defeated further any more.

“I'll go next!”

Therefore, looking out over the battlefield again, she turned the page – page eighteen, the inorganic necromancy of acid.

“Delay, seven seconds! Fifteen metres on the front-right, a flock of Kerberos!” She ripped it, and delivered the page,

“Yes!”

Ellis received it, and passed the arrowhead through the paper, firing her bow where she was instructed.

The Kerberos ganged up in teams of five, and was just about to rush on a few soldiers. In the middle of that, the arrows, which flew in and pierced the ground, invoked the inorganic necromancy at the point of impact. A pond of acid which spewed cloudy smoke spread out, burning the beasts' feet.

The eyes of the young man, who seemed to be a captain of Ten, sparkled, and he was heard shouting at his troops.

“All hands, don’t let this chance get away!”

Even though the magical beasts were trying to escape from the unbearable poison, they could not move their slippery feet nimbly. If their agility was snatched away, even they were just run-of-the-mill targets. They were stabbed to death by the soldiers' spears and bows and arrows.

With that, it was two places. However, they were not done yet. They would still do it as far as their eyes would reach–.

“Next, twenty metres on our rear-left, two Orcs engaged in battle with our forces, the delay is... six seconds!”

They wanted to retreat carrying the wounded people. In other words, page 320, the inorganic necromancy of a smokescreen.

“Yes!”

“Next... Seven metres on our rear-middle, one Salamander, the delay is three seconds!” The hot wind that the Salamanders breathed was a nuisance. Consequently, it was page twenty-one, inorganic necromancy of freezing.

“Yes!”

“Thirty metres above our diagonal-right, a Griffon is gliding, the delay is seven seconds!” The soldiers could deal with it if it were to drop to the ground. That being the case, it was page 196, inorganic necromancy of lightning.

“Yes!”

Before long, after they took a short break, the cooperation between Raimi and Ellis was repeated.

Raimi's judgment of the war situation and the selection of the inorganic necromancy that she chose to respond with, and the chain of sequences to find the intended pages, never took more than five seconds. In addition, since the grimoire was invoked with a time limit from when the page was torn out, it was necessary to swiftly deliver it to the place where it was to activate. What enabled that was Ellis' archery.

The sequence of movements was extremely rapid. Her aim was unparalleled. The distance was not mistaken either. Rather than that being her skill, it was due to the power of the Elven Tribe – the organic necromancy.

Currently, Ellis' insides of her body, surrounded by spirit energy which revitalised it, strengthened her physical strength, reflexes, eyesight, and also her ability of perception. Easily pulling a bow that human males would have a difficulty pulling, immediately capturing the far-away opponents which were disappearing into the Mist of Earth, and perceiving the flow of wind with her entire body, she accurately fired the arrow with an unstable trajectory, which had the paper stuck to it.

With a mastery which already only could be thought of as her being an expert – asking the person herself, she said that she did not seem to be particularly skilled with the bow among the Elves. Did the Elves as a whole excel at archery, or was the organic necromancy amazing to the extent that it boosted the mediocre skills' areas? Probably, both statements were true.

But, however accurate Raimi's judgment of the war situation was, even if Ellis' archery was excellent, if they did not adjust to each other's breathing, they would not be able to win smoothly and speedily. In the half-month from when they departed the Drill Academy until they arrived at the Great Fortress, the two did nothing but practice that coordination together.

Raimi could not wield a sword. Her martial arts were also similar to a novice's. Speaking of the things that she could do, she displayed the information which she had amassed in her head, and turned pages of books as much as she could. She thought that she couldn't play an active role on the battlefield. Though her being able to accompany Milifica by her momentum was good, it was certain that she was a burden, so she always fretted with a "What to do?" in the depths of her heart.

On that journey where she held those worries, Ellis had suggested it.

“If I shoot the arrows, you can protect me with those grimoires, can’t you?”

She had said.

“Even I want to, because there’s no way I can afford to always stick close to Imina, so if there’s something I can do, I want to do it. Even if I am to use organic necromancy with archery, being exposed would be hard, and surely I would do well, I think. Therefore, let’s protect everyone together—“.

Raimi wanted to respond to Ellis. She thought that she could respond to her comrades. Therefore, she would do what she could, to the extent of her abilities. Raimi’s inorganic necromancy would, protect the arrows which Ellis fired.

The melee, which up until then had been disadvantageous, gradually turned to the humans’ advantage. Like that, the enemies would be unable to take their eyes from the supported Order of Chivalry of the Wildcats, which would make it easier for the comrades to fight—.

“It’s splendid! Raimi, Ellis!”

Facing them, Milifica smiled.

“The backing of the Order of Chivalry of the Wildcats is steadily going better. Next time, please lend that power to us!”

Decapitating the Cockatrice which sprung at the horse and sending its head flying, she encouraged Raimi and the others. Within that gaze, her heart throbbed greatly.

—Yes, that was it.

In the battlefield, there was no need for meritorious deeds. It was fine to not receive a peerage. She only wanted that person to praise her. She only wanted to become helpful to that person, and fight together with that person.

And wasn’t that because that person was the Princess of the Royal Family of Astzeelen? Because that person was Lady Milifica – because she was her important comrade which had accepted her.

Ellis and Raimi backed the battlefield, while Fream, who readied his magical spear, was filled with morale, waiting for Devils and Demon Beasts to attack those two. Also, at both sides, while Sashtal and Milifica were attached to the line of defence, they engaged nearby magical beasts in battle.

While gazing at them from behind, Imina confronted a Demon. He breathed out in relief and admiration at the comrades' hard struggle. Though they had been hastily trained for only half a month, he thought that they were going quite well.

Originally speaking, their individual skills weren't so bad. Milifica had more qualities than Imina if one only were to look at fencing, and Fream had the cleverness to precisely aim at the opponent's weak points too. Because Sashtal was born and raised in a hunter's household, he exceeded in agility and raw intuition. The only one that he was worried about was Raimi – but, there was no way that she was making the best of her strong points like that. And if Raimi was doing well, there would be no need for any others to worry.

The most important thing when fighting Demons and Magical Beasts was to perceive one's own strong points, and bringing them to the battles that one would fight. Compared to humans, they were genuinely strong as living beings. Their physical strength was capable of feats of destruction, crushing humans like berries, with agility that could close up the distance the instant one lost focus, needle-like hair and rock-like skin that guarded its body, and possessing fangs and nails with sharpness equivalent of a sword.

Some of the Magical Beasts also had things that could fly in the air or breathe fire. Even if one were to challenge them fair and square, you would certainly not win. Therefore, one wasn't to fight them fair and square. The only thing humans had that they didn't – was to be mobilised to the maximum degree, to fight cunningly.

While using one's strong points and not allowing the opponent to do so, the chance of winning would rise an order of magnitude higher. For an example, if it was a huge Ogre, a group which held long-handled spears. Because the Ogres' fixation with appetite and sexual desire was high, bait suspended and used as traps was effective. There was no need to keep up with a Goblin's nimble agility, you could simply stop their feet. Instead of using a blade which had difficulty piercing the Trolls, with their entire body concealed in long hair, acid and flames worked very well. It was relatively safe to oppose Kerberos-like magical beasts from a long distance with a bow and arrow.

Of course, even so, danger would follow. One instant of carelessness could lead to death. Even if one wasn't careless, the opponent's physical strength and reaction velocity could exceed one's imagination. If one were to overlook the battlefield, there would be many things that one couldn't handle. Even the Order of Chivalry of the Wildcats, who actually were used to battle, had been at a disadvantage until Imina and the others had gone to war. However – to say that even the experienced soldiers lost would be to look from another perspective; if the tactics were good enough, there were even chances that amateurs could win.

Although, if he were to give such a lecture, he wouldn't have all that much persuasiveness. During the journey when they came there, Milifica and the others gazed straight at, and refuted him many times with a "Aren't **you** fighting it from straight in front of it?", and because it was like that, he couldn't practically demonstrate it to them first-hand. He thought that he wasn't a good lecturer. Still, what they had become in a paltry half-month was pleasing.

After that, he hoped that it would be good if the results came out well without wasting their effort.

While he came down to the battlefield, he began with slaughtering an Ogre, then bringing down another nearby Ogre, and yet another Ogre. Currently, what were his enemies were two Trolls which had lined up; in other words, they were his fourth and fifth. Happily lined up, their bodies covered in thick hair, they shook, bellowing like a mixture of a cow and a baby.

Both of them held a stone axe, carried in their hands. The stones' surfaces was dyed in blood, and pieces of meat were stuck to them. A short while ago, they had surrounded the soldiers and relentlessly beat them to death.

"What's that. Did they get them from their little shepherd?"

"What kind of guy is the Elf who is leading them?", he thought.

What could be guessed from the things that he didn't find was their position – the small "Elven Forest" which thickly grew at the front of that battlefield, was that they were hidden there, for sure.

"It's a cold guy. I will leave it up to them."

He would surely leisurely drink tea while looking out at the trends of battle. Without

dirtying his hands, relishing in the beasts' roars and the humans' screams.

“That little shepherd of yours... I'll kill him soon!”

While he shouted that, he charged in. The Troll on the right reacted and went ahead. Brandishing its stone axe, it struck.

Evading, he counterattacked, hitting its head with his sword. And, along with that, he took some distance from the right side; in other words, he turned to where the stone axe couldn't hit. It was not possible to rob an inorganic presence of its spirit energy.

As if it was invited, the Troll let loose a slap with its empty right arm. He received it with the middle of the crimson sword – named “Exellis”.

With a tremendous shock, his body fluttered in the air. Though the Troll was the same size as a human, a middle-sized Demon, it possessed strength that was incomparable with humans.

“Ku...”

Understandably, his entire body hurt. Nevertheless, Imina's cheeks warped in delight. Because, the weight of the shock was proportional to the following stroke of the blade's power.

After flying a few metres, he landed. The soil under his feet was gouged out. At the same time as when he fixed his posture, he charged back in like a football which bounced back.

“Guh, buoh, ah!”

The Troll, which had hit Imina a while ago, opened its beastly mouth and cried something. However, both of its hands loosely hung down. Didn't it have a head for counter-attacking, or was it very negligent? – Over there, there were two, and that way, there was one, even if they lost to the likes of humans in numbers, there wasn't a chance that they were a threat to them.

Then, you go ahead.

“Number four!”

The red light, which coiled around the sword blade of “Exellis”, decapitated the Troll on the right side. The response was trivial. It was like cutting butter. Even the dense body hair that guarded the neck and the thick subcutaneous fat, was sharply, ruthlessly cut up by the light of destruction.

“Buoooo, ooooh!”

Was it angry that one in its group was killed? The other Troll artlessly swung down its stone axe. Because it was immediately following the attack, evasion was impossible. The sword’s light did not even remain any longer.

But, it did not really mean that Imina depended on the inorganic necromancy of “Exellis” for everything. When it was impossible to use, it was a story of it simply being good to deal with it using pure fencing.

The huge rock, which was unleashed without any skill, was dealed with and parried. Slashing his sword upwards, he diverted the orbit.

A boom. With the dull impact, his hand grew numb. As one would expect, it was not as magnificent as Milifica’s hooking parries. Nevertheless, the stone axe did not get stuck in Imina’s head, but in the ground instead. The Troll stiffened a little. There was a gap.

“...Rah!”

Without a moment’s delay, he struck its shoulders with a karatake-wari.² Without stopping the movement, twice, thrice. He repeated the strikes with the power of his entire body. Changing his position was toying with it, keeping the distance was drawing nearer, faster than the opponent could counterattack.

Of course, the opponent was unperturbed. Defended by its body hair, it was not given a single wound. However, the more you slashed at it, you could slash it, as the crimson sword blade stole spirit energy from the inside of its body.

There was no need to steal the spirit energy from the other party’s attack. Even with the impact from that, the inorganic necromancy was invoked. Of course, because the effect was remarkably lower compared with the time of unleashing, it was compensated for with numbers. When the quantity of stored spirit energy was below the threshold, the blade never emitted light.

And, his body remembered when the threshold of just how much energy was

accumulated was exceeded.

Three more hits. Two hits.

“With this...”

One hit – invocation was possible.

“Number five!”

“Exellis”, which swept down, left behind a crimson phosphorescence on the Troll’s neck. While the spirit energy, which was being substituted toward the power of destruction, became a shapeless power of destruction, it was diffused from the sharpness of the blade, and cut off flesh and bone.

The Troll, which had lost its head, crumbled down while blood spurted from the opening of the wound. There was already nothing which moved within three metres of Imina. Lying at his feet lay four pieces of meat. They were the torsos and heads of the two different Trolls.

His mouth faintly warped into a smile. His hand, which held the sword’s hilt, was numb. Though he had many wounds, there were none on his bones or internal organs. His entire body was tormented by feelings of fatigue and pain. His head was faint from the exaltation of battle. His thinking didn’t work too well.

Instead, his line of sight flew around.

As a whole, the progress of the battle leaned toward the advantage of the Order of Chivalry of the Wildcats. The numbers of Demons and Magical Beasts had been greatly reduced. With the left-wing unit receiving the gains from Raimi and the others’ backing, it seemed that about half of the monsters had fallen back to distract the left-wing unit, pursuing them.

And – looking out over the battlefield, suddenly.

The corpse of a soldier which the Trolls had tormented a little while ago caught his attention.

She was still a young woman.

She could have been in the middle of her twenties. Her face was almost intact. Instead, he was obsessed with the body. He wondered how many times the stone axe had been swung down. From her abdomen to her back, it was like a carpet made out of blood, dirt, and intestines, all sloppily intermingled. What retained its original shape was one breast of hers.

Her expression had warped into one of anguish and despair. In front of her right arm, which was stretched out as if it was trying to grasp something, fell a magical sword. Her left arm only went up to her elbow. It had probably been eaten by the Troll.

Looking at her, the depths of his stomach unexpectedly cramped.

“...uh!?”

It was not nausea. What was rising up from his stomach was not vomit. It was something else – though it had no mass, it was the most heavy thing that existed in the world. It was muddy, yet it clung to the targets that it clung to more firmly than everything else. It was tremendously cold, yet hot enough to burn everything. In other words, it was hatred, or an intent to kill consisting of hatred.

It was as if it was scattered about among the corpses that lay here and there on the battlefield. Why did this soldier’s corpse give him that impulse? Well – there probably was no reason to it. Unexpectedly, her face, tainted by anguish and despair, entered the gaps of his relaxed mind after he had finished the battle. And, the human named Imina’s heart was so brittle that hatred overflowed from him from only that kind of trivial occasion.

–The scenes from his birthplace had become sparks and was played in the depths of his head.

Holding his sword, he was filled with strength. The numbness from when he parried the stone axe a while ago changed into a darkish feeling of intoxication that, before he knew it, encroached on his body. It hurt. The sweet intent to kill hurt.

Why, for what was he vaguely standing about? Wasn’t the best yet to come? Was it enough to kill only five Demons? After all, because the Demons and Magical Beasts were mere substitutes, however many he would kill, he would not feel satisfied.

Beyond that point lay the “Elven Forest”. Them, carefully watching the fight with careless faces with sharp ears – he would pierce that abominable tribe which had ears

just like Shirjis.

He took one step forward. He thought that they probably had gone outside. If he were to wait for another few seconds, wouldn't the walking probably turn into a sprint? What did not let him, was his name being screamed.

“...na, Imina!”

Vaguely turning back, a woman who had the face of his elder sister was just close to him.

“Uruha”, he spoke, taken aback.

Even though it resembled her, it wasn't his elder sister. It was the princess of the country, who also now was Imina's friend,

“Mili, fica...?”

His mind, which was foggy, cleared up in an instant. He shook his head. He was aware of his heartbeat. He put his strength in his extremities. His stomach, once again, was engulfed in the urge to kill and hatred, which had settled in his chest.

“What's the matter? Are you injured?”

“Ah, no, it's all right. Nothing.”

“Ellis told me. That you seem to have achieved your goal. That's why I wanted to withdraw, but even if I went close and shouted there was no reply.”

The white horse snorted behind her. It seemed that it had been anxious since she had stepped down from the horse.

“Sorry, I was thinking a little... We're pulling out, you say? Got it.”

He shook his sword, the blood splattering off, and put it in the sheath which was installed on his waist, behind him.

That's right – what am I losing control for?

Ultimately, the purpose of that battle was to surprise everyone in the “Order of

Chivalry of the Wildcats", and to earn certain merits of war. Furthermore, it wouldn't be good to overdo it and snatch away the merits of war that the Order of Chivalry of the Wildcats were to attain. To say nothing of entering the "Elven Forest" alone and bringing down the enemy army's heads.

Something was wrong with him. That was a no-go.

"Hurry, Imina. The soldiers have started to notice whether there is a leeway that they can overcome the trouble with over here. Because the right flank will turn around and attack soon too, so before it becomes troublesome..."

"You see, Milifica."

Imina resolutely spoke to the appearance from behind, who had her feet on the horse's stirrup.

"What kind of face did I have earlier?"

"...That would be."

She was silent for only a few seconds.

Before long, she turned around toward him, and spoke with a somewhat sympathising voice.

"I'm so sorry, just a bit more... Until you return to the fortress, please stay in a valiant figure. As for me, I need that power of yours."

That was also the answer directed toward the question.

"Got it. I'll pick up the Demons' heads. Tell Ellis to turn the horse around, will you?"

"Right... Sorry, Imina."

Kicking the horse's abdomen, she raised her face into a dignified posture. She sonorously told the soldiers on the battlefield her words of farewell.

"With this, we will return." The meaning was that she thanked them for allowing her to struggle jointly with them. And, that the Order of Chivalry of the Wildcats' daring fighting style left deep impressions as a result, that the newbies such as her had a lot

to learn from them, that she was roused – she did not forget to add more flattery.

Returning that, cheers came from all around.

“Well, you as well, and so on – you are such brave warriors”, and so on. There were even people who wished the Princess eternal life. Though there at least were people that thought that Raimi’s backing and Imina’s hard effort saved lives, was it really like that within that left-wing unit? In any case, it could be some kind of destiny.

“Imina, you’ve done well.”

Ellis approached with the horse. She handled the reins quite impressively with her small body. But, it was cute because her feet did not reach to the stirrup because of her short height.

“Ah, it seems like you’ve done well too.”

“Mm, I got a little nervous, but... I also went hunting at Mount Boleanu.”

When he was told that, he remembered when they were confined to the mountain. For those four years, Ellis did not utter any complaints even once, but was completely devoted to supporting Imina. They always procured food together. Holding the bow, which wasn’t really his strong point, killing an animal for the first time since he was born, taking out the entrails from its body with a dagger – surely, if he hadn’t done those things, he would probably free-spiritedly braid some milkvetch or something, with his small hands.

Them standing on the battlefield in that moment was all because of Imina.

Despite that, how was he? Surrendering himself to his urge to kill and hatred, only thinking about killing his enemies. Moreover, that enemy was not only Ellis’ brethren as an Elf, but also Shirjis, her brother-.

Feelings of guilt tormented his chest.

He felt sorry that he had changed his fate, and turned it onto a road full of severity. However, Imina did not say a single word of apology. Because, conquering the road to revenge together with Ellis, was exactly what Imina had decided. Also, displaying the feelings of regret themselves, would be a betrayal against Ellis – and his murdered mother and elder sister, the people of his birthplace.

“Ellis, what face am I currently wearing?”

Instead, he asked that.

The same thing that he asked of Milifica some time ago.

Ellis answered, gently smiling.

“There’s blood on your cheek, you know? You have to wash your face when you come home.”

Therefore, Imina laughed as if to reciprocate.

“It’ll have to stay like that for a little longer. Besides, I’ll need to hang those Demons’ heads when we return. It seems that I have them... If you hate that, you can maybe get on Milifica’s, or Fream’s horse?”

“No, Imina’s back is fine.”

“I see.”

Picking up the Trolls’ heads, he threw them at the horse. Ellis, who received them, took a few arrows and fastened the hair on the heads to them, fastening them to the rear of the saddle. Just like when they lived at Mount Booleanu, and brought back pheasants that they had brought down.



Directly under the Eastern Eighth Gate, overlooking the Fortress’ walls, soldiers were assembled. Their numbers were a hundred or so, all members belonging to the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves.

Occupying the observation platform and its environs, they made merry, and gambled. The drinks as well as the gambling were directed towards the same things – in other words, they were in the midst of being excited about the outcome of the violent acts carried out by the party of the new captain which had been appointed just that morning.

About one third participated in the drinking bout. Because they had no interest in the first place, the remaining two thirds were not to be found in that place. Only

participating in the betting, they then returned to the lodging house. Even if one thought of seeing the results with one's own eyes as to assure oneself, it was a literal drunken craze.

There were three baskets which the wagered tokens were thrown into. Would they scurry home with dispirited faces, or return as corpses, or would they not return back regardless of life or death? Though all sorts of expectations had come, they eventually settled on those three.

Anyhow, they were mere new recruits which just had left the Drill Academy, and to make matters worse, their numbers wouldn't even make up a Squad of Ten. So, therefore, the alternative named "Winning and returning" didn't exist from the start. The essentials of their predictions was, how their real natures would become transparent.

If they were shameless people with big mouths, they would disgracefully scurry home. If they were to have a reckless death-wish, they would be transported back as corpses. If they were boasting cowards, they wouldn't return back in the first place.

The most predominant was "Not returning". The runner-up was "Returning as corpses". The one which was the least predominant was "Escaping".

The reason for why "Escaping" was the least popular was because of the boy with them, who had let forth his bizarre bloodlust. That presence was somehow different from simple recklessness and disdain brought about by ignorance. He would, perhaps, fight to the last, involving his allies – many people thought so.

Also, as relish to the alcohol, who among those three women was the most attractive, what kind of howling screams would the Princess make if she was forcibly violated, what kind of jeers were they to make if those people were scurrying back, they were doing what they pleased, they ranted on with that kind of low-life prattle. While the guards, who were about to leave, frowned, they passed by without stopping as if it would be troublesome to be involved with them.

The merry-making scene itself was by no means unusual.

Even if they were said to be at the front-line, not every soldier of the large army's 30,000 troops was put into battle day after day. Normally, regarding small skirmishes, the amount of people who came onto the plains was about 10,000. Even in times when the fort was attacked by the enemy army, the limit of troops able to participate in a

defensive battle was about half, at best – the other half would be appointed to stand by at the rear guard. In other words, the soldiers fought every three days on average, the remaining two days being days off. And, speaking of what people did during those days off, the majority of the soldiers drunk.

However, ordinary soldiers wouldn't behave as if they were in an uproar, occupying the castle without considering what a nuisance it would be to their surroundings. Were the ones who did it a unit glad of their victory which they were just about to win through in the great war, or a crowded-out group of people which didn't take into consideration that they were disturbing their environs? Of course, it was the latter, and the guards frowned at them too.

“A mishmash of troublesome people” – that was the assessment that the Order of the White Wolves had received from the other Orders of Chivalry.

People who disturbed order, with bad manners. A bunch that though they were skilled, never listened to orders. People holding criminal records who volunteered for the job, wishing for amnesty. It was established so that that kind of people could be enclosed in one place, so to speak, an Order of Chivalry like a place for the disposal of waste.

There was hardly any chance that they were to be given any important missions, nor any expectations of military gains, and their military duty once every three days also ended with just dealing with stray Demons and Demon Beasts while taking a light stroll on the battlefield. It was rumoured that they were in that state without dismissal, because they otherwise would become bandits and robbers pursuing the army, and causing damage to the country; for the sake of becoming sacrificial pawns, thrown into a bloody battle, when the time came.

Did they understand that themselves? They never held back from their defiance. As if they were to forget their lives which they had reached their limits of, and their futures which had no destination, they spent their days self-indulgently.

Therefore, the matter of the new captain Milifica and her followers was the perfect new amusement.

“Uh, what's the time?”

While gulping down a bottle of wine, someone asked that question.

“How long until you guys are leaving?”

“Hasn’t something like two hours passed, yeah?”

Another person answered, while filling their cheeks with dried meat.

“I’m gettin’ tired of this half-arsed waiting. I’m fackin’ sleepy ’cause I got up early, yeah?”

“Well, we haven’t decided to stop it, yeah? If number one is correct, waiting forever is a waste too. Around this time, those guys should have returned sneakily through some other gate somewhere, and already are in the middle of the mountains.”

“Nah, if you think hard, there ain’t no meaning in waiting for number two, right? They’re outnumbered, and even if a comrade of theirs dies, they can’t bring it back, and they’ll be annihilated all the more.”

“Are you a fackin’ idiot? Not to mention those other brats, that new captain is from the Royal Family. If she is taken home even as a dead effing corpse, you’ll get a reward. Even if they’re annihilated, won’t someone from another unit come for it then?”

“Huh? You’re the idiot, you bloody half-baldie. Even if they’re gonna get a reward, how many guys on the battlefield know that she’s royalty in the first place, huh?”

“Kakakaka, you ain’t wrong!”

“...ut the fuck up! There might be someone who knows, fuckface!”

With dirty words and belligerent manners, they roared with laughter.

Within them – a single soldier brought up a subject with a group of people which quietly stood in a corner of the fortress.

“Hey, Ziadrene, what number did you guys bet on?”

Their surroundings gazed at them from all around.

Though they were quiet, they were a group which emitted a frightful presence. In the middle of them was a muscular, bearded man, and a beautiful woman in the prime of her youth, who in a slovenly state was embraced by his arms. Furthermore, surrounding them, there were about twenty followers, which revered him as their leader. Obviously different from the other, gloomy people, seemingly trying to rid

themselves of the alcohol day after day, an unusual presence followed their bodies. It seemed that the other group members also acknowledged his superiority, the tumult had dying down just like the receding waves.

Before long, the man in the centre, who was named Ziadrene, gulped down from a wooden barrel containing ale, and spoke.

“I ain’t betting on any of those numbers.”

“Oh, but you guys, didn’t you throw any bets in the box just a little while ago?”

Next to the three baskets where the betting tokens were to be put, lay a wooden box with a heap of silver coins. It was expected to be split equally between those who won. Attention was drawn to the box, and to the soldier who guarded the box, in the role of a bookmaker.

“Oi, Distah, you listening?”

“Er, erm, I’m listening. I’m listening, but you know...”

Distah, who was in the role as a bookmaker, was at a loss. He had a grimace that seemed to say that he was hesitant to speak of his own accord. The woman in his arms, who was smoking a cigarette, answered instead.

“I too have the same viewpoint as this person. I’m not betting on anything.”

“Madam Fiene, by that you mean...”

Ignoring someone’s inquiry towards the woman – Fiene,

“Well, it’s like half and half or something.”

While Ziadrene spoke to no one in particular, he gazed far-away from the rampart, and onto the Great Plains.

“It was pretty good, that bloodlust. Without ability, you can’t release that kind of sword-spirit. However, Demons and Demon Beasts are completely different from their human opponents. I wonder if that youngster understands that.”

“That red-haired boy? It surely did look like he was skilled... But, if only one person of

skill is mixed in among them, there ain't no meaning, right? No matter how you look at that other lot, you can only feel that they're wet behind their ears."

Fiene sneered at the objections that the crowd had raised.

"Ha! You guys, you ain't got the discerning eyes of a woman. I guess it's because you only fuck cheap prostitutes."

"Of a woman? Where the fuck is the woman in her..."

"Hey, everyone."

Exhaling purple smoke with a puff, and sighing at the same time, she shrugged her shoulders.



“Everyone, that Princess, that silver-haired girl, and that chick with glasses. They’ve got guts. That kind of good women are close to us. Even on the boys’ side too, they have a promising future too, right?”

Everyone was taken aback. But it seemed unlikely that she was joking.

But, no-one laughed carelessly laughed. Because the party of Ziadrene and Fiene had earned themselves that much fear among the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves. The voice which tore through the silence, which seemed to say “How should I react?”, came from the top of the observation platform.

“Heeeeads!”

A man, which was a follower of Ziadrene, shouted.

He moved the telescope to the side and gave it a big turn. After that, he pushed out his opened palm in front of his face.

“Hey... Erm.”

The leader’s bearded face warped immediately, as he shouted while roaring with laughter.

“Five of them? Now, ain’t that more than expected?”

“You serious!”

“Hey, that’s amazing!”

“They did it!”

Mimicking the boss, the followers one-by-one raised cheers of joy.

“Somehow or other, it seems like the bet is our win.”

Together with Fiene’s words, one party walked up to the bookmaker, and lifted up the wooden box. The bookmaker, gaping, opened his mouth in astonishment, while staring only at the mountain of silver coins being carried away. Ziadrene struck his palm with a fist, and stood up.

“Well, assholes, it’s a greeting! Our new captain and those awesome fucking brats are

returning!"

Spilling their alcohol and throwing away their meat, Ziadrene's gang went down the rampart's stairs.

The other people couldn't understand.

"What the fuck just happened?"

"What the hell, is this..."

Though their non-understanding faces, with puzzled expressions on, met for a short while – before long, without any particular reason, they approached the rampart, made an appearance at the edge, and looked down over the Great Plains.

Then,

"Hey... What?"

Under their eyes, they discovered a group riding on horses, riding straight toward the Eighth East Gate, and became speechless.

Traveling as the vanguard, was the blond-haired princess, perched on a white horse. And following that, five boys and girls. It was the same number as when they had left. They had returned without being short of anyone.

There was not a neat person. Everyone was, more or less, covered in dust and blood. They were not dirty as if they had played in it. It was, beyond doubt, proof that they had wielded their swords at the boundaries of life and death. Among them, especially the red-haired boy caught their eyes. He wore a completely tattered overcoat without bothering to wipe off the darkish blood splattered across his cheeks, and laughed weakly while giving off an oddly dreadful presence even from a distance. It was as if the excitement of battle still lingered within him. With a face that seemed to say that the battles were insufficient, and that the killing was insufficient.

A girl with bluish-silver hair clung to the back of the saddle – what was suspended from her both sides was inhuman; five monsters' fleshly severed heads.

It was incredible.

However, it was unlikely that it was a trick.

Assuming that they, with only six people – had raided the battlefield and acquired the Demons' heads. A Squad of Ten which appeared together could boast of having the strength of narrowly being able to get one, even so, five heads.

“...What's that.”

It was a voice filled with admiration, where even the colours of despair could be heard.

“What are they, those guys.”

When they had left the gate, facial expressions of mockery and contempt had been seen on the the people's faces, but now, they were of surprise and horror, and later on, awe.

Some people even began to shiver as they remembered their bad behaviour in the morning.

The princess – Milifica Yusala Astzeelen stood before the gate, and shouted loudly.

“Open the gate! The Third Army, Second Division, Eighth Battalion ‘The Order of the White Wolves’... has returned!”

Though it was the name of the Order of Chivalry that they belonged to, she had made a sound that was unknown to them. It was as if they somehow were a heroic and honourable unit.

Footnotes:

1. A traditional Japanese battle formation, as seen here.
2. A Japanese cutting technique, beheading someone while following the spine.



Chapter 8

第八章

汚泥よ、閉塞を孕め

Chapter 8

Oh sludge, conceive a blockade

One month had passed since Amaïz Julieta had been denoted from the vice-captain post of the “Chivalric Order of the White Wolves”. In other words, one month had passed since Milifica Yusala Astzeelen and her hangers-on had started to achieve military gains, inevitably – similarly, the period of time where Amaïz had continued to receive General Dali’s reprimands had also been one month long.

General Dali’s mood got worse day by day. Specifically, once every third day, when the “Chivalric Order of the White Wolves” sortied. The previous day, it seemed to have been the tenth. In all of them, she had victored, and done meritorious deeds.

Every time that happened, Amaïz insistently summoned someone, and took out all his spite on them. That girl, has she not won again? You son of a bitch, what exactly did you do while being next to her? Don’t let her perform meritorious services! The way things are going, won’t her military fame even reach the Royal Capital-?

It had nearly been a decade since Amaïz had begun to serve Dali Shukua Astzeelen. It was far before the war with the Elves had started, back when the skirmishes of the savage tribes of the South still were active.

At that time, he was one of the Division captains of the Southern Expeditionary Force, and Amaïz served as an vice-captain in the order of chivalry which was attached to his division. The state of affairs from then precisely resembled the current ones.

Amaïz’s superior officer, the leader of his order of chivalry, was still a young and excellent soldier, and it was whispered that at how things were going, if he got promoted, him becoming a corps commander, or probably a division commander, would not be a dream. Besides, his bloodline was of a branch close to the royalty. If someone which belonged to royalty were to take him in, there was a chance that he could be bestowed the rights of succession.

However, concerning that result, that didn’t happen – he sadly died in battle, hit by a stray arrow. About half a month after Dali and Amaïz had become amiable.

Ten years from then. Steadily, Dali's promotions piled up, and now he was the supreme commander of the Front Maintenance Forces. Throughout all that, Amaïz continued to unconcernedly belong under the command of the army corps which Dali commanded.

He was not a vassal or anything. He hadn't signed a lord and retainer contract, not even once officially receiving direct orders from him – in other words, he was some kind of agent operative, receiving secret orders and performing dirty deeds.

Ten years ago, Dali's rank of succession was the 32nd place, and now he was in the 15th place. Of those previous ranks, he was proud that about five of them were because of Amaïz's achievements.

Apart from what had happened lately, he thought that Dali was a good employer. His character had a few petty aspects, and his disposition was obstinately malicious, but, he was also cautious and reliable, looking from another perspective. First of all, not being detected, second of all, reliably succeeding, and third of all, the size of the outcome – even if he conspired, he would never do absurd moves, nor take chances. He did not easily throw spies to the wolves, he gave them rewards, earning the trust, and he kept it serious.

In other words, it was a comparatively easy task, where the other party received vast rewards.

That the spies which held secrets were dealt with was customary in the world, and he had been continuing to make use of himself throughout ten years. Furthermore, during that time, he had not even once tread on thin ice. Therefore, Amaïz wanted to live up to his expectations, and be useful to Dali as much as he could, but – lately it hadn't worked so smoothly, he had only provoked wrath.

Dali blamed Amaïz for having a lack of ability. Amaïz wondered in his heart whether Dali's plans were naive. However, on the other hand, he also thought – that they possibly weren't bad.

The quality of the plan as well as the time of the execution did not deviate from the usual, and if it had been earlier on, it would have been accomplished long ago. If that was the case, what was the cause? It was obvious.

So to say, they were being outclassed.

Milifica Yusala Astzeelen – as she was the daughter of the dukeship of the family of Yusala, connected to the Royal Family of Astzeelen, her rights of succession were at the twelfth place, a young girl at the tender age of eighteen. Among the royal family, she was a girl who naturally preferred attire of war to dresses, and desired sword fights more than ball dances, perceived as a reckless tomboy. At least, General Dali evaluated her like that.

No – he did only evaluate her to that extent.

Wasn't that a mistake from their side?

Possibly, even Dali was aware of that in the depths of his heart. However, he did not want to accept it. That Milifica – that girl, wasn't a simple tomboy.

From time immemorial, in heroic tales, anecdotes from the hero's early years were inevitable. In most of the cases, strange anecdotes were left behind from their childhood. In brief, those anecdotes were of their behaviour and character differing, and standing out from the others. That they were obviously different from the other, great majority.

However, in a case where those eccentricities were not understood by their surroundings, they would simply be treated as just an oddball. Recognised as oddballs and eccentrics, but nevertheless ignoring what other people say, and after they grow and become famous, their surroundings understand that they are not strange – but a hero instead. Thus the eccentricities of the hero become anecdotes, and those which mock those eccentricities become fools of the masses. In a case where Milifica were to become such a person, General Dali would be in the role to make her look better, the fool of the masses.

That was why he didn't want to admit it. That her steady advance couldn't be stopped was a misconception that they had a cause to do so, so as long as her dispersions went smoothly, his temper would get worse.

“...Well, what's up with that?”

In his room – Amaïz pondered behind his official desk while leaning back together with his chair.

Now, two roads are made apparent to us. Number one is to keep going like this, continuing to elaborate on the plan of Milifica's continued ostracism. The other is to

encourage Dali to switch plans, and choose to cater to Milifica. Though I guess that Dali will be reluctant, in truth, the latter will be the best, I think.

When he observed her day after day from the position as an vice-captain, he was completely consumed by anxiety. The hunch that it was inevitable that they would continue to achieve military gains day after day filled hid chest.

Yes. Indeed–them.

The masses of the surroundings were unable to assess the behaviour of the hitherto unknown, young, hero. Those who could assess her – those to which it was transparent that she was not an eccentric person but an excellent hero, were only those with eyes which could correctly identify extraordinary things. Again, those who walked together with that hero – were only great people, which similarly to heroes housed extraordinary things within their bodies.

Consequently, great people got together next to other heroes, spinning tales together with them. Within the “Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves”, it could be said that it was Ziadrene’s gang.

Endowed with the greatest strength within the Order of Chivalry, they were rowdy people which could be said to be the most powerful people in the shadows. Instead of having true strength, they did not follow the orders from above at all – they were a troublesome group of thief-wannabees – for some reason they seemed to be pleased with Milifica, and nowadays they were entirely assistants, which achieved merits of war and had become some kind of comrades. It was as if they saw her as a hero.

Of course, not only Ziadrene. In the first place, she was accompanied with extraordinary people from scratch.

Amaïz could not forget the scene that he had seen one month ago.

On the first day where she had been assigned as the new captain; at the onset, before the harassment had commenced, where he had spread out a bed of nails, Milifica had left for the battlefield with only five men in her forces.

One of those five people – the red-haired boy with an old cloak swept around him.

He had nothing but that kind of impression, that he was an impertinent brat with a hateful look in his eyes. He thought that that kind of person would excitedly plunge

into the battlefield at the very beginning and easily get killed. That kind of people occasionally involved their allies and caused damage to them. If Milifica would become one of those, the work would have finished easily during the first day, where he secretly smiled in his heart.

However, the result was the complete opposite.

He had come home with five Demons' heads suspended to his horse's saddle. Covered in spurts of blood, while he was clad in a sad and gloomy thirst for blood which seemed to destroy himself, he nevertheless did not let a single comrade die.

And – he had spoken to Amaïz, who, hearing the news, greeted them in a panic.

— “If you feel that this is insufficient, we can go once again”, he had said. While he tossed away the Demons' heads before Amaïz's eyes, carelessly, somehow happily.

Imina Halmatie.

The one which Amaïz truly was afraid of was not Milifica, but that boy.

If one were to ask, it was said that he practically hunted the five Demons alone. If he had such skill that he could kill Demons with a single horseman, he would be one of few in the Imperial Army. However, raising five decapitated heads on one departure, in his first campaign, furthermore, with a calm face, besides, people being able to boast “We can go once again” – with the exception of him, Amaïz had never heard of anyone like him.

Was he a great man, or a madman? If one were to only look at pure achievements of war, Imina Halmatie defied the norms. And, precisely because he was afraid of him, if he could win him over, he felt that he could tame Milifica.



Ziadrene Meindreigh was a man whose age had passed his mid-forties.

Vertically as well as horizontally, his body was wide, and he had a grim, bearded face, along with a sharp glint in his eyes which made one question whether even magical beasts would run away with a single glance of his. His presence which he emitted was also overbearing, and however much one were to look at him, he was not a decent sort

at all.

His career was that of a former thief. Possessing a hideout in the mountains near to the Royal Capital, he seemed to make a living by taking money and goods from assaulting nobles which were out traveling. Though he was finally arrested a few years back and sentenced to death by decapitation, because the war with the Elven Tribe similarly broke out at the same time, counting on his physical strength, he was dispatched to the front-line with his entire gang. Henceforth, he had been put to work as a soldier for more than about two years at the Great Fortress of Astzeelen.

The condition for pardon was one thousand decapitated Demons' heads. However, what he had achieved until then was less than twenty. Arriving early and clutching the real power within the "Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves", it seems that he had been leading an unfettered life.

However, that feared strength and unparalleled tyranny from the period when he was a thief had not declined at all, despite him always taking irresponsible strolls on the battlefield for over two years.

While Imina breathed heavily, he sat down in protest, the big hatchet's trajectory drawing close to the bottom of his neck, and looked up at Ziadrene.

"It's my loss, shit."

Ziadrene grinningly smiled, pulling the big hatchet down and shouldering it.

"Ha, your strikes are still weak. Not only the speed, but you need to put your back into each and every strike of yours."

"I get it, if it is as easy as you say, I would have won more."

Standing up, he swept away the dust while sheathing his sword. His arms were still numb from the shock of when they had exchanged blows. If one were to speak about the power, it would probably be like an unskilled Demon's.

Everyone who watched began to boisterously make noise.

"Oi, with this, how many wins and losses is it?"

"Boss has twelve wins and four losses. Imina still has some way to go."

“Oi, hey, what’s ‘still more to go’? You, competing with Boss and getting four wins? Also, wasn’t this time real close, no? Even if he gets a fifth win, it wouldn’t be strange.”

“Don’t say stupid things, if it was me I wouldn’t even want to fight in the first place.”

“What, are you playing innocent?”

“That’s how it is, it’s obvious that Imina is stronger than us!”

They guffawed and laughed roughly all over. They were Ziadrene’s followers – in other words, they were his subordinates from the time when they were thieves.

They were in the small training spot which was equipped in the boarding house of the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves.

A round room encircled by walls around three metres high, the diameter was approximately ten metres. Because it was insufficient in size for organized warfare, it was principally intended for individual matches, as the atmosphere was close to an arena’s.

It was said that those kinds of facilities were bestowed upon every Order of Chivalry, it seemed. One could say that it was special to the Great Fortress of Astzeelen, which spread out in the Mi Lou mountain range; its size being that of one town.

Although, it seemed that the training spot hadn’t been used normally for a while. It was about a month ago when they started using it again. It was when Imina and the others had grown closer to Ziadrene and his gang.

“Oi guys, you’ve worked hard.”

A woman spoke from the top of the wall with a voice of neither amazement nor gratitude. A slightly listless, but a characteristic, sensual tone of voice. It was Ziadrene’s lover, Fiene Ringheim.

“You’re, just as arduous and enthusiastic as back in the day, aren’t you, eh?”

With showy high laced boots, abundant black hair, she wore clothes which showed an awfully large amount of skin, as if she was a demimondaine. However – on the other hand, without flirting with other people, she did not sell herself cheaply, resolute dignity and pride was felt from her. From the gang’s side, she was called “young lady”, and was idolized.

“Kahaha! The man which found an amusing toy has become just like a child, or something!”

Ziadrene looked up to Fiene, and a hearty laughter left his bearded face.

“...Don’t call people toys, will ya.”

Though Imina definitely frowned, he didn’t feel bad in his heart.

–When did he first think that it was fun to wield swords?

Four years had passed since his home town, Salaid, had been destroyed. His training in the mountains was only so that he would grow stronger, it was only so that he could acquire the power and technique in order for him to kill his enemies. Receiving instructions from a certain woman, he continuously had bouts every day and night with her, but that being fun was unrelated.

The things in his head were about the future – after he had come down the mountain, he thought about nothing but cutting down Demons and Elves with those hands of his. And after he had descended the mountain, he devotedly put that into practice. Relying fully on his intent to kill, he hunted down Demons, slaughtered magical beasts, and killed Elves, nothing more.

Therefore, what he truly enjoyed with the sword, was probably the times when he endeavoured with Shirjis, in those pastures on that hill.

There were also times when he avoided it. Even when he had a bout with Milifica at the Drill Academy, he ran away without doing it properly. Focusing too much on killing in combat, there not being any reason to take on a person and compete in fencing and so on, with a “That is a sport in a world that does not concern me any more”.

It was an unimaginable misunderstanding. Because, the feelings of competing against a strong opponent and wanting to win against that strong opponent, would not make oneself stronger.

Imina’s abilities had certainly increased from the last month. That was unmistakably thanks to the help of Ziadrene, who had become his opponent in that way.

He was not alone. Fream, Sashtal, and also Milifica – they continued to practise every day with those who held similar skill to them in the gang.

Despite that Fream excelled in his physique, he unexpectedly had a tendency to get cold feet, even though he had both the virtue of resolution and courage. Though Sashtal excelled in his intellect's sense of danger, he consequently had a tendency to turn and run away, but became able to take the last step necessary for victory. Though Milifica's flaw was that her way of fighting was too elegant, she became able to interact with unrefined actions from outside fencing.

Thanks to their repeated practice, their fights once every three days grew more stable. If the days continued to pass steadily, everyone would develop and become reliable soldiers.

It could be said that the current state of affairs was a pleasant miscalculation.

No-one would expect that one month ago. There was no way that they would gain friends from the Order of Chivalry. And, that result – that they were able to penetrate the centre of the Order of Chivalry that easily.

“Hey, Ziadrene.”

While he wiped off his face with a damp towel, Imina asked the giant which squatted down on the ground.

“You guys, why do you do us well that much?”

That day, what those who had greeted Imina and the others when they had returned after their first campaign had said at the very beginning was:

–That's some nerve and skill, we're pleased with it. We welcome the new captain.

As a matter of fact, that short comment worked better than the decapitated heads of the Demons which Imina had displayed.

In the “Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves”, where everyone was a ruffian or a crowded out person, Ziadrene's gang, which showed a strong presence, where one glance from a group member would put anyone into place – since they had become allies, the Order of Chivalry's air had changed. If the gang were to become compliant to Milifica, the other group members would not be able to disregard it. Even if they were to fight, Ziadrene would compensate for the deficiency of dignity and leadership which Milifica still lacked. Disregarding Amaïz, who was the recent vice-captain, he even occupied the leader-like roles of a staff officer-cum-frontline troop.

Would they become compliant just because he was pleased with them until then, and

so on?

The reason was because their personal histories were their personal histories.

“Are former thieves happy to support people of royalty?”

“What, are you curious about that kind of small things, boy?”

Ziadrene’s bearded lips bent, slightly sarcastic, which somehow seemed like a gesture in order to dodge the question.

Nevertheless, he continued.

“I can’t decide whether it’s a small thing or not. Because that depends on the strength of the sentiment that you guys hold against the Empire... I don’t know what you guys think of the Empire. Therefore, I can’t say whether it’s big or small.”

“Ha, you’re an intelligent brat.”

What came in return was a sigh, mixed with a snicker.

“But, it’s just like that. What exists within our chests are our things, and it doesn’t concern ya”

“But, if you think that you want to know, it’s selfish, innit?”

As he persisted, Ziadrene, annoyed, smacked his lips.

“You’re never at a loss for words, are ya. Good grief... If it were usual, I would sock these kinds of people into silence, but socking you into silence would require too much effort.”

While he whinged, he still muttered just a few words.

“Well, I dislike the Empire. Especially those noble bastards, they make me wanna puke. That’s the resentment in my mind that hasn’t changed since I was a brat, long ago... I don’t know about you who, who was brought up in the borderlands, but if you’re born close to the royal capital, there’s a lot of stuff.”

Certainly, Imina had never been to the royal capital. Therefore, he didn’t know what

kind of place it was. He wondered what kind of life those which were born in the vicinity of it lived.

“We hated the nobles. That was why we robbed them. Recapturing what they had stolen, killing in retaliation of them they had killed, crushing in return like they crushed us. It was the best work.”

Did he recall long ago? Ziadrene’s eyes were tainted by hatred, and his facial expression was distorted by his intent to kill.

Imina was discomposed by that, but felt sympathy after that.

—Yes, that was — exactly.

It is probably similar to the feelings which I hold to the Elves—.

However, the thirst for blood quickly disappeared. It turned into a joking face, a face making fun of himself.

“Well, that time we were easily arrested, but now we’re thrown into a soldier of the Empire’s spot... Frankly, it’s certain that before we met you and fought with you, we didn’t think even one bit. So, we’ve spent over two years on getting drunk on alcohol. So after we’ve gotten free meals from the fucking Empire, it’s OK to care a little, I guess.”

Unnoticed, the surroundings quieted down. Everyone in the gang was lost in the story that Ziadrene told. No, or — it was possible that Ziadrene spoke as a proxy for his comrades in the gang.

Or perhaps, they all wanted Imina to listen to them.

“Even the royalty... Still, in the times when we were thieves, we haven’t met the royalty not assaulted them, but aren’t they just an extension of nobles? So they’re bad whether we hate them or not. But, I don’t hate that little miss at all. What we hated about nobles, was that they looked down on us commoners from a high place, because they usually looked upon us who were falling ill and dying from starvation like we were insects. But, little miss is at least wielding her sword in the same place as us. Boy. I’m properly seeing you become frenzied and chopping down Demons. Am I wrong?”

“You ain’t wrong.”

Granted that she was royalty by birth, her pride was high – at least, Milifica,

“She knows well the meaning that we are stained by their blood.”

“Right? If that’s the case, it’s pretty fine. We’re not really pledging allegiance to little miss, and we don’t really want to toady up to her either. I’m pleased with it, while I thought that it would be interesting to play around, that’s that. In truth... Rather than rotting away getting drunk on alcohol, I prefer to wield weapons, really”, he said.

That smile was awfully good-natured, and attractive.

Imina was unconsciously fascinated. The reason for why he lead a gang of thieves – even after he had been arrested and become a soldier like that, he had a hunch of the reason why his old friends didn’t change and stayed close to him. That was not the result of him dominating through fear or power.

“Oops, I bollocksed. Oi, because I moved my body, it’s food-time! I guess the preparations are done!”

Ziadrene stood up, and shouted at Fiene, who examined his expression from above the wall.

“Aye-aye. Even if you don’t shout that much, I can do it. Bloody hell... Eating a large mean after you’ve gone wild with a sword, that reminds me of when you were a thief”, she wryly smiled.

“Ya, all right! I’m aware that the amount of food I can eat has decreased since then.”

Slipshod thrusting his large hatchet into the ground, Ziadrene turned his back.

Following him, his subordinates started to go toward the training spot’s exit and to the dining hall.

“Hey, miss, did Ellis help today as well?”

“The bread which Ellis has baked is really good.”

Someone started to say that, and voices following that started to spring up all around. Fiene, with an ill-natured expression on her face, spat out from high in the sky.

“Ey, you guys, are you unhappy with my cooking?”

“N, no, we ain’t at all!”

“It’s a major principle that miss’ dish is delicious. Simply, above that...”

“Never mind the flattery, get up here immediately!”

Ellis slightly popped her head over next to Fiene, who roared at them. Gazing at Imina, she waved her hand with a smile; silently telling him “Today, I baked the bread”.

“That’s right, the ones that the girl wants to eat her bread are you small fries, isn’t it.”

Fiene laughed at a volume that wasn’t audible to everyone in the gang which had left for the dining hall.

Ellis’ cheeks were coloured a little, and she turned her face away from Imina. Seeing that kind of child, Fiene turned her hand to Ellis’ shoulder with a “That’s so cute!”. Imina suddenly remembered his mother.

Of course, both Fiene and Lill were completely different in both their ambience and looks. But, with her attitude where she tenderly touched Ellis – something resembling strong emotions filled his chest.

Imina again returned his glance from Ellis, who averted her eyes in embarrassment.

–On that subject.

While passing through the door in the training spot, he thought back upon the conversation which he had held with Ziadrene a little while ago for one reason or another, and suddenly he was reminded of his sense of discomfort.

During the exchange, he felt that he had only noticed one strange phrase.

That was it. That was, when he began to talk about himself.

–I don’t know about you who, who was brought up in the borderlands, but... ,

How did Ziadrene know that Imina had grown up in the borderlands? Imina had neither heard of him during his upbringing, nor had he spoken to anyone in his gang.

Had any of his comrades said anything? However, him being born and raised in the village of Salaid in the borderlands was a matter that was deeply concerned with the human named Imina. Now, everyone knew the name of the village which was the place where the war begun. Therefore, it didn't appear to be likely that any of his comrades had told anyone of his birthplace without his permission. All of them precisely possessed that kind of judgment.

Or perhaps, they were inquired from, and they had hid the name of the village with a

“Something like the outskirts of the borderlands”.

Surely, it was like that, and it probably wasn't anything to especially worry about. So, thinking about that sense of discomfort for only a few seconds, Imina promptly forgot about it.



Fiene looked down from the top of the wall at the training spot which Imina and Ziadrene and the others had left behind. Her profile, which was close to Ellis, was as if she was a mother watching over her child, she thought.

Even seen from her side as a woman, she was a beautiful person.

Her attire, which exposed a lot, her gaudy make-up, and her hair-do which was exaggeratedly put together; every part's sex appeal was excessive, so that when they met for the first time, she felt a little hard to approach. But, when she started to talk to her, when she actually had a chat, she was very good-humoured and friendly. Even if stern men stood in front of her, she was not timid; on the contrary, the attitude which she easily handled them with even felt reassuring, if it was seen from one of the same sex as her.

Now, that was not only what Ellis, but also what Milifica thought, to say nothing of what Raimi thought of her too.

That day, they had cooked lunch together. Of course, there were proper civilians employed by the military as cooks, which fundamentally were entrusted to make the soldiers' meals. However, there was a rule that you could use the kitchen if you submitted a notice of that. Fiene had made meals about three times a week with Ziadrene, and then, with everyone in the gang – the way that she laughed in amazement, but with a little bit of awkwardness with a “That girl is begging for it, isn't

she", was cute in a girlish way.

After the girls had come there and become close to the others, Ellis assisted too. Because she thought that it would be impossible for her to cook since she had become a soldier, it was a pleasant miscalculation. If she failed to cook, her skills and perception would grow dull, and above all, because he spent all his time in battle, she wanted Imina to remember Lill's flavours.

It was the eighth or ninth time that she stood in that kitchen. Recently, Ellis' seasonings had become reputed in the gang. She was very happy. Because it was the same as Lill's cooking being praised. Ellis was fascinated by her early childhood – because it was a very important taste to her.

People disappeared from the training spot, and Fiene turned while shrugging her shoulders.

"Well, we'll also quickly need to go to the dining hall too. Those guys, when they're left alone, they eat everything in the blink of an eye... gah... Because they way they eat is crude, it's bloody troublesome to clean up."

"Isn't it."

Agreeing, the two turned on their heels, and went toward the stairs which lead to the dining hall.

Because the Great Fortress was built in such a way that it clung to the mountain range, the slope was the foundation; in other words, it was not flat. Hence, the internal structure was complicated, and the concept of levels was ambiguous. Now, the two of them were at the top of the wall which surrounded and overlooked the training spot, but if one were to look from the neighbouring building, that too was yet another low place, that was where the dining hall was located – it was a place higher again from where they were, in brief, it was upstairs.

On one occasion, the stairs passed away from the inside of the building, in the middle, it became something similar to a passage and the ceiling came to an end.

When that had arrived to a place where sunlight shone, Fiene began to speak.

"That's right, it's your cooking, yeah."

“...Is there anything strange with that?”

Was she wrong in how she made her stock, or her seasoning, or how she cut the ingredients?

When asked, she shook her head with a “It’s not that.”

“Nothing’s strange at all. It’s somewhat self-taught, but it’s excellent Preadone-style.”

“Eh.”

—Preadone-style?

Suddenly hearing those words that she weren’t familiar with, she inadvertently stared blankly.

She turned her face to her side.

Fiene faced forward without looking at Ellis, and spoke.

“It’s a town at the west of the royal capital. Its features are that it has a sweet seasoning which utilises a fair bit of sugar, with nuts and berries mixed in, whatever it is. What’cha mean... you made it without knowing that?”

She was startled.

She thought that it was bad. The Empire’s geography – no, even the general features of the humans, was something unknown to Ellis. Especially as it was something close to common sense to people.

While she was disordered, she started to explain right away.

“Ah, that. I’m so sorry... I learnt it from my mother, so I don’t really know the details.”

“So, where your mother came from was Preadone, no?”

“Th, that too... um.”

The mother – she had never heard where Imina’s mother, Lill, was born. She thought that since she lived in Salaid, she came from Salaid.

Her heart was pounding.

That her true character would be exposed from just that simple exchange or words couldn't be true. However, Ellis panicked a bit too much. She also thought that her behaviour was a little unnatural too. Fiene was a person with strong intuition. It was possible that Fiene noticed that she held a questionable secret.

However, it seems that it was a needless worry.

Fiene looked at her and laughed,

“Nah, my bad. I guess I was a little bit too prying.”

She hit Ellis' shoulders with a boom-boom.

“It may be Preadone-style, but it doesn't matter. It's tastes that you learned from your mother. There ain't no superior feature that can surpass your mother's cooking.”

“...Th, thank you so much!”

The words were so pleasant that her disturbance of mind went off somewhere. It felt like she would say “You are Lill's daughter”.

Ellis did not know her real mother's face. It seemed that she had died just after she gave birth to Ellis. That was why, always when she was a small child, whenever she went and visited Salaid and was looked after by Lill, she thought in the depths of her heart.

A mother, is it something like this?

Her also starting to learn cooking was also not only because she, as a member of the Elven Tribe, was curious about the humans' cooking. She wanted to feel connected with Lill. I want to receive something from this person, because anything is fine, a connection would be – she wanted proof that they were connected.

She wanted to show someone that proof, that connection. She was all the more happy with one single word from the outsiders which did not know of her circumstances.

If she wasn't fond of Fiene, she would have cried. She could have cried, jumped up, and screamed. Her heart was so enlivened that she wanted to do that.

That was why Ellis really did not pay attention to the words that Fiene spoke alone after that.

“Also, you’ve learned it well at that age of yours.”

So that she would be admired, with a somewhat serious manner.

“Because I can’t really resist cultures unknown to me, y’see.”

Ellis did notice that the words were spoken in a slightly unnatural context. Innocently, she didn’t think much, and she threw out her chest, thinking that she was praised.

“Yes, I’ve worked hard!”



There was no rest within the Great Fortress of Astzeelen, regardless of if it was day or night.

In general, Elves did not prefer night warfare. Therefore, the mobilization of battle, and the withdrawals, were generally carried out at sunset. However, there were also things that needed to be done when they were not engaged in battle, and some people needed to work. War was a thing that continued moving even when soldiers didn’t draw their swords.

The maintenance of the magical swords that they were to use that day. The replenishment of the consumed spirit energy tubes, and the inspection of the inventory. Not only the spirit energy tubes, but also the management of the munitions that held equipment and warhorses. The verification of the amount of the stockpiled provisions. The repair of the damaged facilities. The war council, in preparation for the next day. And, the night-time defence.

From when the sun set to when the dawn broke, there was not a moment where all of the soldiers slept. If there weren’t any tasks for them, there were some units which stayed up all night and devoted themselves to partying. Therefore, in most places within the Fortress, if one were to listen carefully, it was a normal thing to hear people’s voices, and tumult, from out of nowhere.

In other words, that meant that it was necessary to care about other’s eyes and ears, even in confidential talks late at night.

Late at night, 3 o'clock in the morning.

Amaïz Julieta was summoned by his employer, and walked in an imposing manner toward the place as to not be suspected by the sentinels.

In the Great Fortress' centre, in the multistoried building which lay in the innermost department – behind where the most important facilities – the control room and the general's private room, and the Front Maintenance Force – were consolidated. Because the multistoried building's back itself faced the precipitous cliffs, and therefore the defence of it was, conversely, insufficient, it was rare that people came there, so it was a corner named a blind spot, so to say.

Even though it was close to the control room, the likelihood of being seen by someone was quite low, and so it always was used for the secret talks between Amaïz and Dali. Only, that was equally extremely unnatural in itself. They could not afford being questioned by anyone, even by chance. Choosing when the the passing sentinels turned the corner, Amaïz put on the prepared light, dark overcoat and covered himself with the hood.

And, in the promised place, there was a short, plump shadow, which almost looked like Amaïz.

“So, you came.”

The general, Dali Shukua Astzeelen, had already arrived.

“Apologies, for the wait.”

He did not make any excuses. It was not because he was late, but because the other party had waited since earlier on. Even when Dali were to meet with a protege-agent provocateur similar to them, it was seldom that he made them wait. That was mainly a merit, and proof that he was a steadfast employer.

“Then... What's it today?”

Amaïz inquired about the business. It was the way of talking in a dark whisper so that his voice wouldn't echo on the bare rocks.

“At present, seeing the state of affairs, what kind of story would it be?”

His speech was minimal, polite language. Though it would be greatly disrespectful before someone of the royal family, if someone were to be watching, they would know that the other party would be a part of the royal family from the manner of speech. Of course, the name of the other party was not spoken.

“Seeing as even the schedule has changed?”

“Hum.”

Instead of Dali answering, he asked again.

“Tomorrow, if is your turn?”

By “your turn”, it was meant the day that the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves were to go out and fight.

“Yes.”

Amaïz nodded, as if to say that it was just like that.

“However, it is still hard to make a move.”

However, the thoughts that continued were of denial.

“There is no opportunity. Clearly speaking, it is an admirable battle.”

Milifica – yes, the one who substantially lead the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves was not Amaïz but already her instead – for every departure to the front, she grew accustomed to battle.

Ziadrene’s gang was completely contained under Milifica’s influence. Because they were their backing, the other group members could avoid following them. At the present time, the amount of group members which obediently operated following Milifica’s orders were more than two-thirds of the whole. The remaining third were the confidants of Amaïz’s proteges, as well as the genuine leftovers, a useless bunch that did not want to fight wars at all.

All members being about two hundred in name, was somewhat unfavourable to be compared with an Order of Chivalry. However, even if they were at the scale of two companies, they weren’t to be looked down on. Though their military force was small,

they excelled in command and tactics, and regarding their agility, which turned the tables on the small force, they adopted ad-hoc tactics. Besides, Ziadrene Meindreigh and Imina Halmatie – they, which possessed power which could rival dozens of people, became a vital point, rampaging.

If they went to the battlefield once every three days, they kicked about the enemy with few casualties, and made them flee. The battle formations which spread out were phantasmagorical, and the Demons of lower intelligence were dealt with as if they were fine, their heads dropping one-by-one like ripe fruit. Occasionally, when they went with the flow, they even chased down the enemy side's commissioned officers, in other words, Elves.

Since Amaïz was, even as a joke, the vice-captain, he needed to depart for the front with the others whether willing or not. Having followed her marches for one month over there, he was associated with her battlefield.

For that reason, he understood. He did not want to accept it, but he could not help that he already was convinced.

That Milifica Yusala Astzeelen was some kind of genius. And, in addition to that, one of the most troublesome kind. In other words, a genius which obtained the human heart.

If she were to change her words, she would be capable of being the leader. Though Dali wouldn't like to admit it, he thought himself that she certainly was a girl born only to achieve military gains.

It wasn't that her fencing skills were outstanding. Her ability was high, but average at best. Although the posture of her horse-riding figure was good, it was too beautiful, and was sometimes in danger on the battlefield. She did not possess excellent tactics either. Her way of thinking was, for better or worse, textbook-like. If one were to speak that she was equipped with courage and backbone far above the average, that too was wrong. Before they departed for the front, there were also many times where she was anxious, with an uneasy facial expression.

Therefore, if one were to only see her, one would misjudge. That as she wasn't extraordinary, nor exceptional, and as many parts of her were inexperienced and needed to improve, she was an upper middle-class officer.

Yes – that would be a misjudgment.

Her innate talent could not be contained within an officer. Later on, it would be above that – it would be displayed as an officer. Certainly, her fencing skills weren't outstanding. But, instead, she went with Ziadrene and Imina, following them who held the skills to be able to gain great, spectacular efforts. The appearance of her horse running was sometimes dangerous. Still, if one were to look at her figure, raising her sword on horseback, the soldiers would gather together at that beauty, rousing themselves, and raising war cries. She did not have any great tactics herself. But, the girl with the round-lensed glasses which always followed her displayed an eye for tactics, her proposals spectacularly accurate and flexible.

And, even if she held anxiety and tension herself.

With the inspiration from the daring and resolute swordsmen's great efforts and her beautiful standing figure, along with the outstanding tactics and utilization of forces – the unit lead by her possessed both abnormal courage and backbone. Milifica herself did not have the gift of war. What lay within Milifica, was the talent to gather people which held talent for war toward her side, and the talent to make the people that she gathered become good warriors.

She charmed great men, acted as the brains behind their swords and shields, even changing the multitudes of regular soldiers into a single, great spear. In the end, they would grasp the military gains that they wished for to their hearts' content, eventually leaving their names behind in history–.

That was the way it was. Surely it was something like that.

Therefore, Amaïz breathed out a little, and gazed in resignation toward Dali.

“I would like to offer my opinions.”

Today, he came to realize those thoughts.

“Lately, we're disadvantaged... That fish is not the herring that we think of. It's a shark. It is too large, swift, and ferocious. If we are to forcibly pull it in, we might get dragged into the ocean. Is it not better for it to swim, and shoo away the small fish instead?”

Dali squinted at Amaïz's words.

In the darkness, one can't understand what the other is thinking.

However, that was the same for the other side – there was doubt in the voice that returned.

“So, even your harpoon can’t strike it? Or, don’t you want to strike it?”, with a “Surely you weren’t cajoled by that young girl.”

“Nay.”

Amaïz answered, with a slightly stronger tone of voice.

“It is definitely not the latter. It is purely my inadequacy... the former.”

I think that it’s a wonderful talent.

If she were to continue flourishing like that, she would sooner or later achieve a large merit of war, her name roaring even in the royal capital. However, if he was asked whether he was captivated by her talent, that would not be true at all.

Amaïz Julieta was a human without those kinds of brilliant things.

If he wanted a distinguished service next to a great commander, he wouldn’t have joined Dali’s plans in the first place, ten years ago. He did not kill that superior, the captain of that Order of Chivalry.

Walking steadily in the darkness that the day didn’t touch. That was the principle of Amaïz, and the reason for why he had accompanied Dali Shukua Astzeelen for ten years already.

“I see. If you say that, it may be so.”

Dali easily sympathised with him. It seemed that he just wanted to speak sarcastically.

“Then...”

Amaïz expected that Dali would give up and move on to another plan. Nevertheless–,

“However, that.”

It was contrary to his expectations. General Dali proudly stroked his characteristic moustache with his fingers,

“What if we had a net which could enclose the shark and corner it?”

So clearly visible that it could be understood in the jet black, he smiled a stiff smile.

“What, is that... do you say?”

Fear flashed through Amaïz’s spine. It was cold sweat. A premonition of something horrible. It was, simply, a shiver that he never had experienced in those ten years that he had followed Dali and worked in his shadow.

–Was he really such a person as to give off such a presence?

The Dali which Amaïz knew, was a nobody, who was roundabout in his craftiness, and at the same time a tremendously persevering person. In other words, a villain which chose his means, reliably continuing to gather small wins.

That, what was that exactly?

In the gaze which slowly was raised again from when he hung his head, a fiery flame was burning.

“What, there is no need to worry. You only need to follow my instructions, in the same manner as before. There is no particular problem. There will never be a dangerous bridge.¹”

That nobody looked like a beast was placed in front of his eyes.

“Those guys are a lifesaver. What I hoped for came from the other side. It’s also in an unexpected shape. Because there is nothing what won’t be taken in by this.”

His craftiness was already nowhere to be seen, and his indirect character lay low,

“In the end, even the battlefield is politics. That young girl can’t apprehend that place. Therefore, if she gets excited, she runs around. When she gets excited, she gains merits of war. Because she becomes excited, she becomes something like that... it is determined that the tall branches which stretch out, and break off in the wind.”

Rather than being patient, he had a manner as if it was unbearable,

“Ku, haha! Without me even moving, the above is keeping an eye on her!”

-Ah, I see... that's.

Amaïz finally understood from those words. He did not choose the means. They were given to him.

"Do you understand? This is not my plan. It is the will of something larger, which I am enclosed in."

He didn't pick up small victories himself, but he clung to a large victory which was presented to him-.

Even seeing that for the first time, it was natural. The reason for that was because Amaïz did not know it. Instead of ordering things himself, when he was obeying others' orders – he had such a face on him.

"There's a need to introduce them to you, you see."

Dali suddenly turned his head back.

"Come out, you guys."

From there, they, slowly, came out. Small-built figures – two of them. They came into sight just like ink seeping out.

Just how long had they been there? Since long ago, or, had they come there in that exact moment?

"Yes." "Yes."

Their voices, like bells rolling, overlapped once. The lips of the two assembled – putting together the same sounds.

They were young twins; girls. It could be said that they still were children. They appeared to be thirteen, fourteen, or so.

White skin, round eyes, brilliant lips. The girls, which seemed to be the very picture of sweetness itself, stood next to each other, having the exact same face.

However, Amaïz did not harbour any favourable impressions in front of them.

Because the white skin that the girls had was so white that blood didn't seem to be flowing.

Because under their round eyes, there were dark circles, where the insomnia and illness of hatred seemed to be carved in, in layers.

Because of thin, red lips, which painted a curve that was like a vagina growing teeth.

And, more than anything.

Because of the sharp ears which clung to both sides on the faces of the two, which came into view-.

“Th, ats...”

The girls were not human beings.

They were Elves. The enemies that Amaïz and the others continues to fight day after day at that Great Fortress.

His hair stood on end. The beauty of the girls was repulsive. They were repulsive precisely because they were beautiful.

“My name is Nokt.” “My name is Mikt.”

Pinching the edge of their skirts, they bowed.



With gestures and voices which embodied everything; life and death, beauty and ugliness, charm and fearfulness.

“Don’t put yourself on guard, Amaïz.”

Dali’s attitude was proud. Even though the other party giving out their names was an act that was not to be done in the private talk during the dark night – it was as if to say that that kind of minor detail was inconsequential.

“This, is...”

“Calm down. And don’t be afraid.”

He soothed Amaïz, who near-unconsciously put himself on guard, with a coaxing voice.

“This does not, by any means, go against the Empire. I am, beyond doubt, a patriot.”

And he spoke.

That it wasn’t betrayal.

That even though he communicated with the enemy side, he had pledged allegiance to the country.

In other words,

“This is one part of the task which I have received from the Empire... Do you understand, Amaïz? In war, if one only annihilates the enemy, it doesn’t end just like that. If you look at the postwar period during the war, it is even necessary to cooperate with the enemy side and match paces at times.

—Ah, I see.

“So it’s something like that, you say?”

In the end, war is simply politics which uses iron, blood, and life. Even in the event of a war of aggression starting, it did not change. Rather, for that reason, if it was a war of aggression that had started, the colour of politics would darken all the more on the opposite side. And, in politics, it was a common occurrence to be hand-in-hand with the enemy for the sake of mutual profit.

He thought that if he was a fainthearted maid or something, he would be forgiven even if he fainted. The category of the plan that Dali and Amaïz had schemed out had already moved beyond that scale.

If he were to speak accurately – their plan had been caught on to. By an even larger, more ostentatious, huge torrent.

“Ufu. Please be assured, Sir Commissioned Officer.”

“Yes, Please be assured, Sir Commissioned Officer.”

The twins gathered, and smiled obscenely.

“We are the same. Yes, for the sake of the Elven Tribe, we received our lives, and came.”

“That is right. We are under the command of our lord... Her Majesty the Khan, Radiaata.”

Radiaata Lilithgrave.

During the beginning of the invasion operations in the human world, the name of the queen of the Elven Country was spoken about.

There probably was some kind of secret agreement which connected between the Empire and the Elven Country. What kind of thing it was, was unknown. The right to know would not be bestowed upon Amaïz.

However, Dali, who was the supreme commander of the Front Maintenance Forces, knew the conditions of that secret agreement. No – was it more natural to think that he knew of it from the beginning? Cooperating with the enemy while fighting them; it was precisely because he was that kind of person which held both good and evil, that the position of supreme commander was bestowed upon him.

In any case, in the process of execution of that secret agreement, Dali incidentally noticed that his own objectives could be granted. Or, the orders from the Empire coincided with his objectives by chance.

However, that was like throwing a net from a boat floating in a large vortex. Certainly, if you were in a large vortex, the sharks too were tossed about by the current. It was possible that they easily could be dealt with.

However, awaiting the future would be – ah, even if he thought about it, it would be futile. Because Amaïz was already on that ship. It was already too late to get off. What he could do would only be to do everything he could in order to not be swallowed down by that vortex and smashed, and to pray that he survived.

“I have written down instructions here. Return and read them.”

Dali presented a rolled-up and sealed secret message. Honestly speaking, he did not want to receive it. Although, were he not to receive it, he would be killed there. In order to implicitly demonstrate that, he expressly was with the Elven messengers. Indeed – that person was truly reliable, proceeding with everything.

“The budget for these preparations that I have written down is the same as always. It doesn’t matter how much it takes. Because you will need to scatter around a considerable amount of gold coins... For what, that kind of discretion is left to me.”

“Understood. I will follow your commands.”

Answering just like that, there was no path left for Amaïz.

At General Dali’s back, the Elven twins smiled. It was as if they scoffed at him and looked down on him, an unavoidable, aggravating thing.



The weather on the Great Plains of Mi Lea was fickle. It was because of the mountain range of Mi Lou, which held back the wind and clouds behind it.

That fine weather suddenly was assaulted by showers of rain was an everyday occurrence; conversely, when it rained, the time for it to stop would come at the blink of an eye. There were also particularly awful occasions where strong winds were added to torrential rain.

If the weather changes, the shape of war must also change accordingly.

That the tactics were influenced by the visibility’s good and bad points, and the state of people holding out and fighting on the scaffolding was a given, but there was also a need to take into consideration how every individual soldier made use of their inorganic necromancy during the weather. It was a simple story, if one were in pouring

rain, flame-type necromancy would not be possible, and even if one were to use smokescreen-type necromancy on a day with strong winds, it would be scattered at once – it was something like that. And, such a simple thing troubled the soldier.

Therefore, the most unpleasant weather for them was cloudy weather. Plunging into battle in the midst of not knowing whether it would rain or if the clouds would disappear and it would clear up; after all, it made them anxious. All the more, because when fighting with magical beasts and Demons, one single mistake could bring death upon them.

That morning – the “Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves” were preparing to depart to the front in that exact cloudy weather. The clouds were a gloomy grey, which gave the premonition that rain was to come. On the other hand, the blue sky peeked through here and there, enough so that there was a chance that the clouds would drift away.

“It looks troublesome.”

While straddling his horse in front of the Eastern Eighth Gate, Sashtal looked up at the sky and said.

“I feel gloomy, mate. Even in rain, your dagger doesn’t change that much.”

Next to him, Fream bantered in a fed-up voice.

Well, it is just like that.

Sashtal’s kukri was of the Eftal system; in other words, it was a magical sword which could use only one kind of evocation. That evocation was dissolution – acid seeped out from the blade and burned the enemy to death, which was quite unconnected to the weather, exhibiting a fixed result. If there was a great amount of torrential rain, there was a chance of the acid being washed away, but if there was a little water, the power increased due to hydration instead.

As for Fream, his magical spear was of the Juelamil system, depending on the properties of the loaded spirit energy tubes, it could operate different evocations. Just as much as one could choose a suitable evocation depending on the state of affairs, it held the defect that it was susceptible to the influences from the surrounding environment. In other words; due to changes in weather, and so forth, there was the likelihood that a part of the spirit energy tubes that were carried with it would become

useless.

Though the flame-type evocation was the first on the list to not be used any more when it rained, the flame-type evocation was a very high type of inorganic necromancy in terms of convenience even if rain didn't fall; therefore, as it was a cloudy sky, the option of not carrying those spirit energy tubes at all was impossible. As a result, in a battle where the situation was that the weather was unstable, the amount of evocations that a magical sword of the Juelamil system could let out would inevitably become lower – due to that the amount of spirit energy tubes that could be carried with it was finite.

It was not only Fream's magical spear. Of course, Milifica's knight sword, and practically every soldier belonging to the Order of Chivalry, favoured the Juelamil system. In the extreme case of Raimi, where if her grimoires would get damp from the fierce water, the ink in them would blur, and make them nothing but wastepaper. With the exception of one book, which seemed to be ready to be used, her books were put into the luggage, strictly packed in oil paper.

“Well, it'll be fine.”

Though, I'm not that worried.

“Our usual way of fighting is a short, decisive battle. We just have to end the battle before the weather declines, and even it rains for the time being, you'll be able to return back before our stockpile of spirit energy tubes run out.”

Sashtal laughed, while chewing on the stem of a Harpy Mint.

Gazing at Milifica's both flanks, who previously stood by in the front,

“Besides, the weather is irrelevant for those two which are worthy of being our greatest war potential.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Yeah, certainly.”

Those two – Fream groaned at Imina and Ziadrene's appearances from behind.

That Imina's “Exellis” was able to demonstrate its power regardless of the environment

went without saying, but Ziadrene also favoured equally strong arms.

A big hatchet as large as an arm, it had the inscription “Serpent Smasher”.

The evocation engravings inserted in the engine part of its Eftal-type system was an effective means of bloodshed during any circumstances – deadly poison. Besides, it boasted a weight that made it impossible for an ordinary person to lift, let alone wield, it; his herculean strength aided it as for it to chop through the magical beasts’ hard skin and bodily hair, wounding them, and killing them with poison. It was said that it was a weapon that possessed both heartiness and vulgarity.

Those two were the vital points of the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves’ attack.

There were but a few people in the Imperial Army which could compete with Demons with only one single horseman. What those two possessed could be said to be the strong points of the Order of Chivalry.

They pierced through the vanguards, a strategy that other Orders of Chivalry were rather incapable of doing – their swift attacks’ lightning war made it possible. Charging into the target’s battlefield, disturbing and trampling down the enemy line, immediately withdrawing. Afterwards, they individually crushed those which retreated, and returned with victory; something like that.

It finished with very few casualties. The numbers that they lost during one sortie would be ten, at most.

The disadvantage of that strategy was that it was impossible to annihilate the enemy army, but between completely exterminating fifty enemies and losing one hundred of one’s own during one sortie and finishing by killing twenty among the enemy of fifty and losing ten of one’s own during one sortie, it was natural that the latter was decided. If one were to repeat the latter three times, one would kill sixty enemies and lose thirty, which outstripped the former in both military gains and damages.

At the very beginning, vice-captain Amaïz was greatly opposed. Saying things like “Foolishly reducing the enemy’s numbers without annihilating their army only disturbs the battlefield, doing nothing more than inconveniencing other troops.”

However – ultimately, that opinion was dismissed. The other units in question welcomed the Order of Chivalry’s lightning war. The reason for that was because after the battlefield had been partially destroyed, the enemy army became opponents easy

to hunt due to their comrades.

“...That reminds me, he’s been obedient recently.”

Suddenly, the much-revered assistant commander was on Sashtal’s mind.

He was a person under the command of General Dali; in other words, the hindrance here would be an order. In reality, he had suddenly begun harassing everyone since the first day they met.

However, as Milifica gave him her battle results during her first campaign, and as Ziadrene’s gang, which held the most influential voices in the Order of Chivalry, were pleased with her, he had completely lost his position and authority. According to hearsay, why he had been recognised as the captain until then was only because his influence was sufficient, that there was no person which felt loyalty to him from the bottom of their hearts, and that Ziadrene’s gang weren’t particularly interested in him in the first place, it seemed.

Because he often gave them large amounts of money, they sometimes followed his orders, but when they discovered things more interesting than money, they preferred only that – Ziadrene had sneered something like that.

As always, vice captain Amaïz glumly stood to the side and slightly behind Milifica.

“Didn’t he give up?”

Fream answered Sashtal.

“Something like giving up, I guess that hasn’t happened.”

Even now, he stuck next to Milifica on the battlefield, trying to interfere with this and that. Although, because Milifica herself rejected everything, it always ended in vain. But him only speaking out, despite knowing he would be refused, left a bad feeling.

“There are no great movements, conversely, they’ve stopped.”

“He wouldn’t necessarily sneakily thrust a sword into Lady Milifica’s back from her behind... right?”

Sashtal shook his head at Fream’s question.

“Nah, that guy probably hasn’t the character to cross such a dangerous bridge.”

If Milifica were to be unnaturally injured in that state of affairs, at least they would doubt Amaïz from the very beginning. Besides, if it didn’t only end in injury, they did not have the intention to end it just by doubting him. Only with the proof that they would know, they would torture him, making him confess, and later kill him; unrelated to the military regulations. Because Sashtal and the others were fighting not for the Imperial Army, but for Milifica.

Precisely because the other side understood that, they didn’t do thoughtless things like that.

Conversely, precisely because he was of a careful and prudent character – if he were to move,

“I want to take precautions. I believe there’s enough evidence of a plan being hatched.”

Far-reaching – Sashtal and the others not even able to forecast them, an unthinkable trap would be set, which would even swallow up Sashtal and the others and destroy them in one swoop.

—Rather, should we perhaps get mixed up in the confusion and put an arrow in Amaïz’s back?

Of course, things of that sort would not improve their state of affairs. General Dali would just send in another vice-captain, and moreover, that person could have a character that would do things even more hastily than Amaïz’s.

In other words, the best policy that they were to pick up, would be to continue generating more merits of war, and to become such a position so that General Dali would give up. It was a troublesome journey. However, he thought that it wasn’t impossible.

While he thought of such things, the signal of the departure for the front was blown by the bugles.

The chain which held the Eastern Eighth Gate was pulled, slowly raising the gate. The gate consisted of three layers – first of all, the lattice which was dropped on the inside; then, the iron door; and finally, the lattice which was dropped on the outside.

“All hands, prepare!”

Milifica dignifiedly raised her voice.

The atmosphere of the Order of Chivalry grew tense. Their morale rose, and their fighting spirit was enhanced. Her voice held that kind of power – and it wasn't anything which could be stopped by the likes of Amaïz.

"Everyone, let's travel well, fight well, and return back here without dying... Depart!"

Milifica kicked her stirrup. Her white horse neighed, starting to sprint.

"OOOOOOOH!"

The two hundred people of the "Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves" plunged into the Great Plains of Mi Lea while shouting a battle cry. That was a spectacle that had been repeated many times over the past month; therefore no-one doubted that they would victor in battle as usual, returning triumphantly with few people wounded.



Where the "Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves" received their life of battle was at the south-west part of the Great Plains of Mi Lea – at the enemy's battle formations, at a place about fifteen kilometres separated from the Great Fortress of Astzeelen.

The time that the marching took was approximately two hours.

All members of the group were on horseback. Because there was a great number of horses which allowed two people to ride, the speed itself was in between of a quick march and a slow march, yet far brisker than a march mixed with infantrymen. That was the result of organizing the force with speed as the number one priority using a select few.

At a place about five kilometres separated from the place where it seemed that the enemy army held their battle formation, the forces stopped marching for a moment. To begin with, they sent out their vanguard unit, their purpose being to confirm the size of the enemy.

In those two hours, the weather was in the process of collapsing.

Bit by bit, it started to rain down from the sky, which was preconceived to become a full-scale passing shower sooner or later. It seemed that it would become a battle in

the rain. Milifica gave the order to everyone, to check the loaded spirit energy tubes in the storehouse, and to review the equipment.

Each member started fastening spikes to the soles of their shoes and replacing their gloves with anti-skid gloves. Naturally, they did not forget to rearrange the spirit energy tubes on their leather belts and in their pouches either. There was a need to replace the spirit elements with ones that could be used even in rainy weather immediately; in a place where they could take them out.

Nonetheless, Imina had nothing special to do. Since four years ago, he had always continued to train so that he could fight during any kind of circumstances; if it was raining, he would not let his sword fall. Needless to say, maintaining his demon sword was irrelevant. He even felt like apologizing for having it so easy.

If he were to speak frankly, if one were to attempt a lightning war with a surprise attack, rainy weather was preferable. It was because rain dulled the noses of the magical beasts and the eyes of the Demons. Although, if it were to become too strong, it would instead lead to their own command growing more difficult, so if it fell down, a moderate amount would be desirable.

Before long, the vanguard unit returned.

However, the facial expressions of the soldiers which reported in to Milifica had puzzled colours on them.

“It is strange. The enemy army is in a battle formation at a place considerably distant from the position where our forces are in charge. From here, the distance is about two kilometres... About three kilometres from the near side of the “Small Elven Village”.

“What does this mean exactly?”, thought Imina.

The troops of Demons and magical beasts were based in a small-scale Elven Forest – the “Small Elven Village” – and were always lined up in the vicinities of it. At the furthest, it was normal that they were within one kilometre of it.

The scores of kilometres of space where spirit flowers and spirit trees were in full leaf were places where the enemy took refuge when it was necessary, while at the same time being a gathering spot where the spirit energy served the purpose of healing the Demons’ and magical beasts’ wounds. At times, the Elves in the positions of commanding officers were stationed there too; in so doing, they could become a cradle

for bearing to the fighting power.

Naturally, that “Small Elven Village” could not easily change its position. Therefore, it became a symbol when the Imperial Army attacked the enemy. It was constantly checked by scouts for the position of the enemy which was scattered on the Great Plains; while seeing the general situation in battle every day, every force turned toward every position and appropriately marched there. The other side stood in formation awaiting any flocks of monsters near their base.

From the human side, destroying that position would be the best in terms of military gains. Consequently, when crushing or annihilating the enemy army, it was compulsory that they were to leave after setting fire to the “Small Elven Village”. Of course, it would be difficult for fire to spread in a living forest, and because it wasn’t made with enough volume and density of plants for it to burn easily even in another place, it dealt with it in a struggling at a minimum. The examples of success were few and far between.

Come to think of it – when Amaïz Julieta was summoned, didn’t he say something about how lightning warfare was giving up on crushing their base from the start and thus pointless? In Imina’s opinion, the act of setting fire was useless. Because even if one would succeed in hitting the first one, a new forest would be born.

Rather than forests, one needed to continue beating Demons and magical beasts, and lure Elves, killing them.

Their numbers were few. Unlike magical beasts and Demons, they did not multiply like rats’ spawn. Rather, the ones which increased the magical beasts, Demons, and the forests, like rats’ spawn, were exactly the Elves. Therefore, rather than slaying one hundred Demons, there was more value in taking the head of one Elf.

And if one were to speak of the likelihood of coming across an Elf, frankly, doing a lightning war would make it higher.

Even they weren’t foolish. However strong they were, if the numerical superiority was too great, they knew that the chance of success was slim. In a war of annihilation, a large human army also counted as such so even if all the demons and magic beasts were eliminated, it would be a good plan to just take a nap in the forest without leaving. Because, even if the forest was to be set on fire, the fire would not spread much into the inner parts of it; in the worst case, they could just run away under the guise

of the smoke.

Conversely, if a small army were to wage a lightning war, there was a possibility that the Elves would be provoked and go out instead. Careless from their small numbers, and getting carried away that they could win alone against 200 people.

Although – that time, that hope was faint. Even if one were to hit the bastards which were at a place three kilometres from the position, the chances of the Elves leaving was low.

“s the structure of the enemy army?”

Milifica inquired from the scout.

“Aye. There are about thirty Demons and fifty magical beasts... It’s more than predicted.”

“Was it not a position that was built three or four days ago?”

While Ziadrene roughly stroked his beard, he tilted his head with a deep voice.

“So since the enemies still are few in number, they got passed to us. Right?”

“Yes, exactly.”

To Milifica’s assent,

“It doesn’t seem to be a disarrayed flock, ya see.”

Fiene, who rode her horse, shrugged her shoulders. Because she sat on the front of the saddle and entrusted her back and the reins to him, it was almost like she was a princess embraced by a prince – though, frankly, the impression was more like a wild beast running away with a harlot.

While thinking that, Amaïz brought his bits ² together toward Milifica.

“What do you think, lady captain?”

He was asking as if he was seeking for an answer on how to move the unit.

At that time, his dignity and appearance as a vice-captain had completely disappeared, and he had become a mere supplement. Still, he persistently behaved as an vice-captain, obstinately not leaving Milifica's side, even on the battlefield. Thus, he increased his resolution, forcing his way through. He had a lot of nerve.

“Well... Sir Amaïz, what is your opinion?”

However, Milifica never was blunt to him. Seeing as that was politics too. If she were to treat him impolitely, she would fall into disgrace with General Dali.

He answered, nodding.

“I can think of a few predictions of the state of affairs.”

“What are those predictions?”

“Are my thoughts all right?”

He cynically glanced toward Raimi – the “Tactician” – who was slightly behind Milifica.

“Please tell me. There is no reason for me not to hear my vice-captain’s ideas.”

Milifica displayed modesty to the bitter end.

Amaïz cleared up with a “Well then”, and began.

“First of all, I do not agree with what Fiene said just a while ago, they are a stray flock. I believe that that possibility is sufficient. Sometimes, unforeseen events occur on the battlefield.”

Fiene knitted her brows in displeasure upon having her opinion denied, but, ignoring her,

“In other words, what the vanguard unit found was an entirely unexpected force, very close to the position five kilometres ahead that we are in charge of, where there is another force that we originally were supposed to fight. Compared to when we prepared for that position, it is consistent with the information that the size of the forces was great.”

“Ha, though it’s annoying, he has a point.”

“Thank you for understanding.”

He firmly returned the provoking girl’s murmurs with sarcasm, and continued further.

“Also, tactically speaking, I believe that it is a case where the enemy position is in a battle formation a long distance away. If you say what you come to think of, it’s that they are cooperating with another unit, right?”

“A group of Demons are, you say?”

“Yes. For example... The three units, the ‘Order of Chivalry of the Black Swans’, the ‘Order of Chivalry of the Green Mountain Sheep’, and the ‘Order of Chivalry of the Elk’, are deployed in the vicinity. The enemy army that is fighting with either of them will feign a retreat and turn this way. Of course, our allied troops will chase them. That being done, what will happen? Our party which is searching for the enemy is ready and waiting. Our allied troops will round them up.”

“...I see.”

“It appears that the high intelligence of their tactical nature seem to not have any relation to the Demons and magical beasts of low intelligence. In reality, has not lady captain already encountered this? But that’s not to say it’s completely absent. With the Elves’ orders, they can perform tactical-esque movements.”

“In other words... There’s a chance that an enemy general is nearby and taking command, right?”

At that, Milifica glanced at Imina.

That was because she knew that for Imina, military gains were Elves’ heads – however, what was put into that gaze was a noncommittal feeling, saying “While that may be a good opportunity for you, depending on the situation, you may need to persevere”.

“It may be a situation where the possibilities overlap the previous topic. In addition to the troops which are searching for the enemy, within that position what we are in charge of, our troops, who belong to that position, are in battle formation too.”

Without noticing the silent exchange of words between the two, Amaïz spoke.

“Thus, there are four possibilities we should consider. With the unit out searching as

A and our base's unit as B... are A and B the same unit or separate units? And is A a stray flock, or are they moving under the orders of someone?"

"Raimi, what is your judgment?"

Milifica looked over her shoulder, and asked Raimi, who was in the rear of the line.

"A, aye! They're basically the same unit! I believe if A and B are considered separate units, then if A goes on standby for the plan, B could be treated as one of the units that would carry it out."

"I see, understood."

After the brief conversation had finished, Milifica sank into silence for a few seconds.

And she raised her face, glancing at the two; Amaïz and Raimi; and after that, the leaders – in other words, Imina and the others and Ziadrene's gang, and asked.

"Anyhow, we cannot ignore the forces that have been discovered. That's why we'll launch an assault there and retreat via the planned route when the time is right. How about a plan where the entire Order of Chivalry searches for the enemy at the position that has been entrusted to us?"

"What are we supposed to do if B is at that position?"

The one who objected to that plan was Amaïz.

"We will judge depending on the size of B, and depending on the pursuit of A. If they seem to be attackable, attack them like that; if the danger seems to be high, withdraw before you are noticed, and return while taking a detour."

"However, in that case, you will abandon the offensive at the place which we are responsible of. What we ultimately should look after is that spot. Would that not be a breach of orders?"

That he flared up was a normal occurrence, so everyone had fed-up faces.

But, that was normal as well – Raimi coldly told him of her objections.

"From now on, the chance is high that the weather will crumble more and more. When

that happens, we are at a disadvantage. Rather than doing the unreasonable and take on two units, I believe that it is better to run away."

She was very fluent when she spoke about tactics.

"Hmm. Running from the fight, contrary to the orders. So we are the valiant Imperial Army? To say nothing of that if the enemy is doing some kind of strategy, it is not only our Order of Chivalry's problem."

"After our unit has been annihilated in a free-for-all fight in the bad weather, what is earned by sticking to bravery and influence? There is nothing more foolish than executing a strategy that relies on idealism."

"...uh."

She was a different person from the usual, disordered, one. Even in front of a coercive man like Amaïz, she did not retreat even a step, instead crowding him.

"Though, I certainly think that it is a good idea to take into account the possibility that the enemy is in the middle of executing some kind of tactics. So, let's send a messenger to every Order of Chivalry in the vicinity. In addition, after the retreat, how about temporarily linking up with another Order of Chivalry? There shouldn't be any problems if we think of our next strategy after we join up with them."

And, moreover, without unsparingly deny the opponent's opinions, she picked up the justifiable parts.

"...I see, got it."

Not even the sound of him being lost for words came out, as he had no choice but to agree.

Because of that, Milifica announced to the Order of Chivalry.

"Then, that's concluded."

It was never like Raimi was favoured and Amaïz was looked down on. It was the result of objectively judging from hearing both of their views. Therefore, there was no grumbling from Amaïz.

“We will commence a lightning war toward A, the enemy forces three kilometres ahead of here. It will pass as usual. However, the twelfth platoon; please split into groups, deploy into the vicinities as messengers, and go toward the the Orders of Chivalry: the ‘Order of Chivalry of the Black Swans’; the ‘Order of Chivalry of the Green Mountain Sheep’, and the ‘Order of Chivalry of the Elk’.”

Voices saying “Roger!” arose,

“After we have withdrawn from battle... let’s go toward the ‘Order of Chivalry of the Green Mountain Sheep’. The captain, Lady Cecilia, does not feign ignorance, and is a person who has discretion. If you explain the circumstances, you should be accepted. When the twelfth platoon has finished their messenger duties, they are to return back here. –Again and again, take care.”

Everyone in the twelfth brigade immediately kicked their stirrups and moved away from the unit.

Seeing that with her own eyes, Milifica looked out over everyone in the Order of Chivalry – and raised her sword.

“Well, let’s go as well. Let’s become the wind, become a spear, silently draw near and rapidly attack, and trample them down like a storm. All hands of the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves – follow me!”

Instead of replying her, they drew their swords.

One must not let the enemy know that one exists before one’s appearance is invisible.

The battle cry still lay ahead. It was after Milifica had approved the target, and issued an order. Their battle formation was formed like an arrow, extending a little in the vertical direction. The one who went in the lead was the captain, Milifica. The ones which hardened both wings were Imina and Ziadrene, and immediately behind them, Sashtal and the others, along with subordinates of the gang, followed.

Though there were a few uncertain factors, what didn’t change was the battles that they performed, which had repeated many times until then. If there was an enemy army in front of their eyes, they only kicked them about. It would be a great boon if they managed to lure an Elf over, and all would be fine if Imina was its opponent.

While raising the speed, everyone present pushed on.

The distance to the troops that the vanguard unit had discovered was two kilometres, one kilometre. Until they entered their field of vision, seven hundred metres, five hundred metres.

At the distance of three hundred metres, Milifica waved her sword, and the forces let out a roar in unison.

Ziadrene from the right, Imina from the left, pulled ahead of Milifica as the ichiban yari³. Ziadrene, even though he was embracing Fiene in his chest, shouldered his large hatchet on his with a pompous face.

Everything flowed as usual.

To be precise – it flowed as usual, up to that point, just before they had made contact with the enemy.

The flock of enemies were as if they were soldiers under the command of someone,

“Hey, what’s this...!”

With a swoosh, they broke into two parts.

If it were the same as usual, the magical beasts and Demons would, in response to the bloodlust from them, be supposed to oppose them as monsters without a plan, but they indifferently expanded into a crane-wing formation. It was a perfectly coordinated movement, as if they were controlled by somebody. No, surely they were – manipulated.

By whom? It was decided.

“There’s an Elf! Where!?”

Someone shouted. Imina’s heart sprung up. An impulsive urge to kill seeped out from the depths of his soul.

However, that urge to kill did not spread throughout his entire body. Because, before that – a shock greater than the urge to kill assaulted Imina, and from there on, everyone in the “Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves”.

“All hands, compose yourselves! Keep on breaking through the centre, and restore

your attitudes!"

There was not a person that could respond to Milifica's order. Neither in the sense of replying, nor in the sense of action. The reason for that was because it had happened around the same time as she had shouted.

The Demons and magical beasts, which had spread out in a crane-wing formation, suddenly stopped their movements.

They stopped – immediately after that.

The wall of meat, which had surrounded the vanguard unit of the "Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves" in a semicircle,

"Wh... t!?"

simultaneously exploded with the organic plosive sound called "bang".

Heads of Ogres, torsos of Trolls, stomachs of Orcs, limbs of Goblins, necks of Kerberoi, tails of Basilisks, and bodies of Gryphons, all burst open from the inside. Blood, flesh, skin, and viscera was scattered, staining everything a dark red as far as the eye could see, and what sprung up and extended from the monsters' backs in a squirming fashion, were worm-like, emerald-green stems, dark brown trunks, and multi-coloured flowers.

In other words,

"An Elven, forest...?"

It was spirit flowers, spirit grass, and spirit trees, strangely grown from being exposed to highly-concentrated spirit energy.

Dumbfounded, Imina recalled the scene from four years ago.

The memories of her destroyed hometown were sucked into the 'Elven Forest' within hisview. The same thing as that time had occurred at a speed that couldn't be compared to it.

In other words, seeds of plants were planted within the bodies of the Demons and magical beasts.

Somewhere, an Elf was operating the monsters and surrounding them, while germinating the seeds.

With with the large quantity of spirit energy that the monsters had stored up, the plants grew explosively-.

“Milifica’!!”

He unintentionally shouted.

“Turn around at once, hightail it! At this rate...”

“...Unfortunately, boy. It seems you’re too late.”

He heard a seemingly-resigned, gloomy voice, from next to him.

“Ziadrene, what...”

“Tsk, don’t fucking play around. What the fuck’s this?”

While gnashing his teeth, he loudly tutted, his chin pointing at the front of his line of sight.

“Look at the surroundings. This is un-fucking-believable.”

Yielding, lost for words – not only Imina, but everyone in that place, did so.

What surrounded them was not only the front any more.

That they were gloomy was not because of the weather any more.

The odour of the atmosphere which they inhaled was not of the presence of rain any more.

They were completely surrounded on all four sides, by the “Elven Forest”.

Even though it shouldn’t have been even one minute since it had started, the trees were growing high enough for them to be looked up at.

And, from the depths of the forest – which perhaps was left behind as a seedbed – Demons and magical beasts slowly walked out.

“Uh... Close formation! Please assemble in a square formation!”

The reason for why everyone followed Milifica's orders could have been because everyone had ceased to think during that terrible event. But would that battle formation really have an effect in what was to come?

“Imina’!”

From behind the crowd, Ellis came, her horse's nose thrusting into them. She had thought that it was not a situation to protect the rank and file. Imina conveyed a thanks through his gaze. Her judgment was correct. Beyond that future, where they didn't know what was going to happen, it would be necessary for the two to be together.

“Everyone else's?”

“They're fine. They're together with uncle Ziadrene's subordinates. But...”

Ellis turned back, confused.

“The number of group members has decreased. I wonder if they were engulfed by the forest?”

Imina also looked out over the party. Though they were in the middle of rebuilding the battle formation into a square formation, he could grasp the approximate number of people. There were only one hundred people or so. Then, what happened to the remaining? According to Ellis' worries, were they divided into parts due to the sudden growth of trees?

“No... It's different.”

Though the front and sides had the vigour of raging waves, the rear closing was a little deferred.

Besides, they were in an arrow-head formation – roughly speaking, it was a battle formation which formed an equilateral triangle, and it was in the middle of attacking. If everyone was moving properly, they wouldn't be stretching far enough in the vertical direction to be split up.

In other words, the half of the units that weren't there,

“The remaining guys have surely escaped. We are... trapped in a snare.”

Perhaps, during the assault, the back half of the battle formation almost collapsed. And someone had stealthily fallen back, commanding the rear guards, knowing what was going to happen in advance and stopping their feet just before, turning back.

“...You’ve done it, haven’t you, Amaïz Julieta.”

The shape of the vice-captain, who always kept close to Milifica and finding faults with her, was nowhere to be seen anymore.



That day, twenty-three minutes past one in the afternoon.

When the rain, which had gradually begun to fall since the morning, had become full-blown beyond noon, two reports had arrived at the Great Fortress of Astzeelen.

The informer was the vice-captain of the “Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves”, Amaïz Julieta. It was a return, accompanied with about half of the soldiers that had sortied; that was, in other words, also a rout.

One of the reports was about the enemy position, the “Small Elven Village”, which suddenly had appeared. In the south-western part of the Great Plains of Mi Lea, at a spot about five kilometres away from the Great Fortress, there was an occurrence, as a seedbed of Demons’ and magical beasts’ bodies, which explosively expanded over time. At that current time, it had become a large-scale thing, the size even extending one kilometre in every direction – it was such a thing.

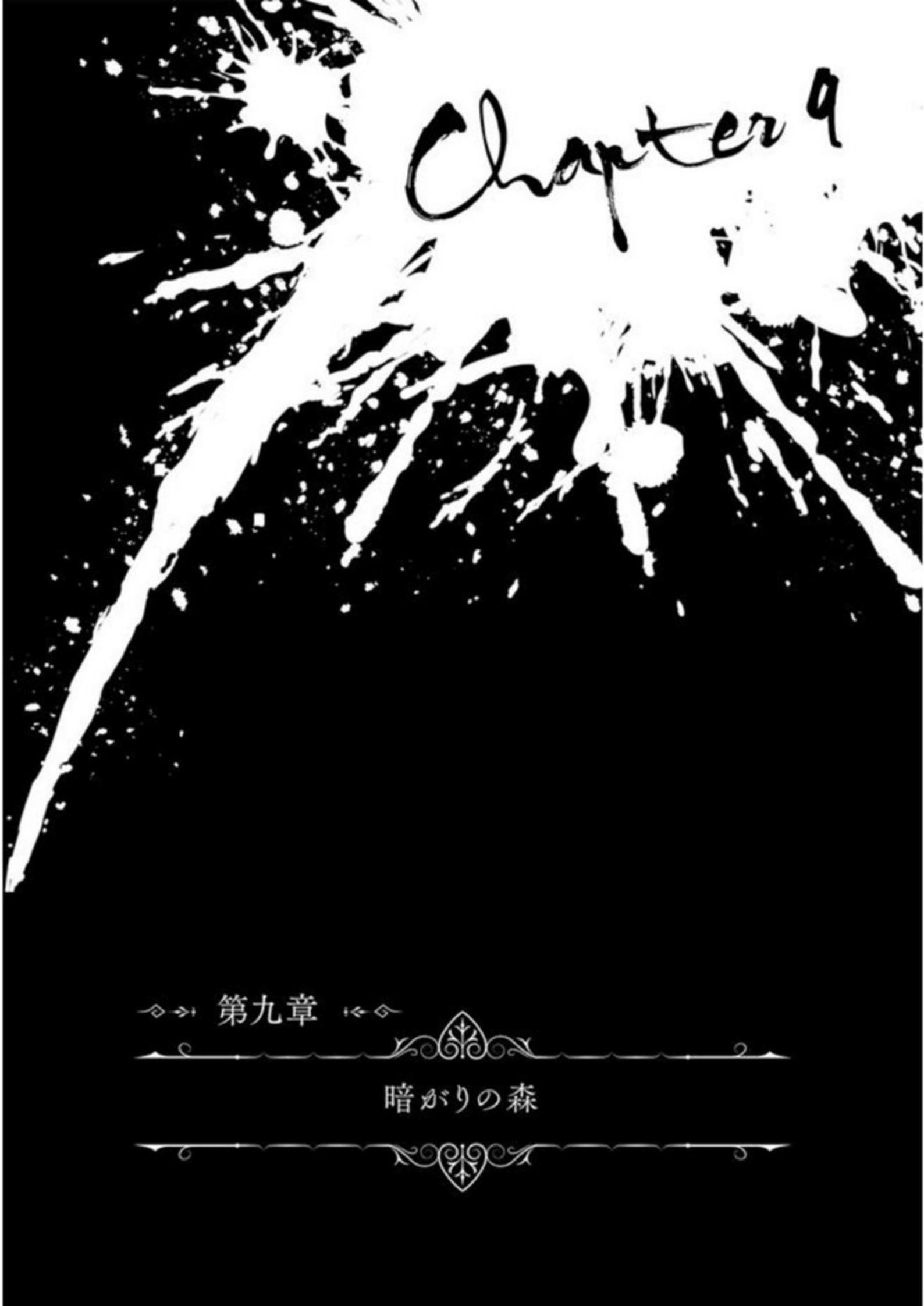
The second report was about the own army.

The rout of the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves, which had “unluckily” encountered it at the site of the outbreak, which had fought bravely in order to prevent it, but ultimately failed to do so. The survivors were about half, including him; the remaining half were engulfed by the forest, their lives or deaths unknown, and that them returning seemed hopeless – he said.

The captain of the Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves, Milifica Yusala Astzeelen was contained within that part.

Footnotes:

1. This idiom is a paraphrase of “危ない橋を渡る, crossing a dangerous bridge”, meaning “to tread on thin ice”.
2. The thing that is placed in a horse’s mouth when riding.
3. The first warrior who breached the enemy line was termed “*ichiban yari*” (the first spear).



Chapter 9

第九章

暗がりの森

Chapter 9

The Forest of Darkness

I want to eat normal things already.

I want to drink clean water already.

I want to sleep like a log on a white bed already.

And, I want to escape from this kind of place already-.

On the one hand, still being alive was a fortune. On the contrary, it could also be said that it was a valuable experience, in a sense. Because, anyhow, there had been no human body which had stayed in that kind of a place for so long until then. If they were able to safely return, wouldn't they try to get even one story out of the gang of soldiers? A pack of scholars would perhaps plunge in, having heard the talk. Either way, they would make a profit.

-While forcibly thinking about those kinds of positive things, his mood and situation was invariant.

As he poked the ashes of a smouldering bonfire with a twig, Fream Eiza weakly sighed.

It's nearly sunset. Here's gloomy even during daytime, and at night it turns into a bottomless darkness. Even if the magical beasts and Demons' attacks gradually become less and less, we still need to be vigilant to the maximum degree. This is a day which will pass without me getting any sleep. This gloomy night is beginning.

About six days had passed since Fream and the others had been locked up in the "Elven Forest". At first they were one hundred members, but now they were less than a third; weakened down, decreasing to less than 30 people.

However, most of the casualties came from the first day, and from the incident that happened within three hours of the birth of the forest, their causes of death mostly resembling something like paying for their own mistakes. From there on, it was an

astonishing survival rate, as seen from an outsider's perspective – *ah, I know that we can be said to have good luck.*

Particularly, he couldn't thank his comrades enough. To be precise, among his comrades, it was that women. If that woman wasn't there, Fream too probably would have died.

Truly – it wouldn't be too much to call her Fortuna, and worship her.

Six days ago.

After they had been enclosed by the "Elven Forest", which had sprung forth explosively, what appeared in front of his eyes was a flock of Demons and magical beasts. What saved him from that was a calm instruction from Milifica. Recomposing the battle formation into a square formation, fighting an offensive from every direction in a group fight, they somehow endured, succeeding in repelling them.

However, after the fight had concluded, the group members' opinions split into two. The first one was, to stop in that place, compose themselves, grasp the state of affairs, and to attempt to carefully pierce through the forest with everyone. The second one was, to advance straight ahead, because they would sooner or later arrive at a stop, which they were to do as soon as possible. The one who advocated the former was Raimi – in other words, Milifica's party and Ziadrene's gang approved of it. The ones which advocated the latter were those excepted, without loyalty to Milifica, who they were passively attached to.

To conclude, the latter bunch did not obey them.

Milifica insisted on that they weren't to be impatient, an exceedingly natural thing. It was easy to lose one's direction within a forest. If it was an "Elven Forest", all the more. Though it was unclear how much the Elven Village had expanded, if one were to recklessly advance, it was not always that one could break through. In other words, "*One should, first of all, create a base and then slowly and reliably advance*".

However, the opposing faction feared the dangers under their noses – in other words, the "Elven Forest's" characteristics, the dense spirit energy.

Though the spirit energy was the power which streamed through all things in nature, it became a poison to life with too much of it; similar to how plants, which had too much fertilizer, decayed. And the spiritual resistance of the race named humans was

not high enough to tolerate the spirit energy of the “Elven Forest”. It was said that generally, one’s head would be spinning after half a day, that after one day one’s senses would become disordered, and that one would lose one’s life after two or three days. Under those circumstances, one would not have the time to go slow.

In the end, the lot that were the opposing faction departed, uncompromising. What, consequentially, happened with them became obvious in about three hours – by the Demons, which attacked, carrying in their hands shields where the crest of the “Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves” was engraved, along with splendid magic swords.

In any case, it was not expected that they would be able to escape.

Within the forest, spirit energy which caused illusions had been crammed. What they had noticed after they had finished defeating the Demons, was just before the sun grew dark. Even though they intended to walk straight by marking the trees, they returned back to the first spot.

In all honesty, Fream was, as expected, temporarily in despair at that time. At any rate, nearly six hours had already passed since they had been entrapped by the forest. Though he hadn’t noticed any abnormalities in his physical condition, it wasn’t amusing that he started to feel heavy in his head before long. To make matters worse, he was totally exhausted from continuing to fight the Demons and magical beasts. Nevertheless, the result of him walking forever was the place of the beginning. He gave up, thinking that it was already helpless.

The one who rescued him was Ellis. And, unexpectedly to the extreme – it was Fiene. At that time, he was truly surprised. It was not only Fream. Even Milifica, Imina, Sashtal, and Ellis, became speechless at that unforeseen event. When an immediate escape proved impossible, Fiene had spoken.

–Dearie me, it can’t be helped, this.

After that, she glanced at Ziadrene as if to receive permission.

Ziadrene nodded, as if to say *“It’s fine”*. After that, she suggestively gazed at everyone – not her own subordinates, but toward Milifica’s comrades. As if to say *“Mind you, young’uns, this is a secret”*.

“Well, maybe it is unnecessary to call attention to it.” –

Fiene leaped off her horse, and walked toward Ellis.

Shrugging her shoulders to Ellis, she spoke.

“Now, we’ll need to take care of everyone, ya see? Drinking water for meals, and then a campground. What, isn’t it simple? For both you and me, it’s a custom that we hold from a nostalgic place.”

And she untied and spread out the pitch-black hair that was gaudily arranged. The untied hair became an ink-black waterfall, and the tips which were suddenly revealed through the gaps in her temporal region – sharp as bamboo leaves, were long ears.

To everyone, who, aghast, lost their words, Ziadrene jokingly laughed a hearty laugh.

“So, isn’t she a fine woman?”

If one were to think about it now, Ziadrene’s gang did not display much confusion, even when they were trapped in the “Elven Forest”. That close to twenty men all kept calm was because they had the relief that they could turn to Fiene when push came to shove.



Cutting off branches from nearby trees, in an appropriate length. If it was possible, hazel was preferable.

Putting the cut end up and the pointed end down, deeply thrusting it into the ground.

What came after, was that the spirit energy in the branches passed through and spread throughout the ground, searching for signs of water.

After that, one was to apply organic necromancy to the branch which changed its shape and traits; extending and spreading out the pointed tip throughout the earth, absorbing moisture and filtering it. The water which overflowed from the cut end was let into a leather bag.

After that, if one were to boil it up, which removed the spirit energy, it would result in drinking water.

Luckily, that area was a wetland, so even if they searched for water there was no trouble. Because there was a large amount of water which could be extracted, it was comfortable, because there was no need to walk about searching for water. While remembering that sequence of work which she remembered, she fastened the leather bag, which had become full of water, to her horse's saddle. Extending the next leather bag, her eyes met with Fiene's, who similarly drew water from a branch next to her.

Therefore she laughed, and said.

“When I practiced this in my birthplace, I didn’t think that it actually would be useful.”

“I guess, yeah.”

Fiene responded, with a still-friendly smile.

“This thing is a technique from a long time ago, when fellow clans fought about territory. As long as a river is nearby, you can get as much water as you like. Just a little before I left my village, people were starting to actively dig water wells.”

“For me, water wells were already commonplace.”

“Even if I say that it is the Elven Tribe’s pride, because the human technique is convenient, it’s simple. There’s no need to cut and insert hazel, but on the contrary there is no need to go to the river.”

“...I see.”

It makes me feel strange when I talk about it somehow.

Having left the Elven Tribe four years ago – not only speaking about the village in that way with one of the same tribe, but that other party was also who she thought to be a human until not long ago.

Six days had passed since she it had become evident that she was an Elf, but, on that subject, it was the first time that they were alone. Because it was troublesome, she thought that she would ask about this and that.

“Did you understand from the very beginning, Fiene? About me.”

“Yeh, that’s true. Yer easy to understand.”

While catching the water which overflowed from the cut end of the branch, Fiene responded as if she was amazed.

“You didn’t dye your hair, and some designs from the Elven Tribe still remain here and there on the clothes that you wear. Humans won’t notice, I guess, but seen from a colleague’s perspective it strikes home.”

“Uh, so that’s it...”

She reconsidered that she might have had weak defences.

Surely, Fiene looked like nothing but a human. Her hair was dyed black – a colour practically non-existent in the Elven Tribe – and her make-up was gaudy. Her clothes were indeed vulgar, and there was nothing that reminded of an Elf.

“Well, don’t worry that much. You’ll be fine as you are now.”

The consolation she gave, was that she needed to be careful just a bit longer. However, that was a story if they could get out of there.

“At any rate, we’re saved. That barrier is amazing.”

It was thanks to Fiene that the group members still were alive in the “Elven Forest” after six days.

At the present time, the barrier which blocked the dense spirit energy, which was courtesy of Fiene’s organic necromancy – entirely covered the campground as a semi-sphere, the diameter about twenty metres in diameter. As long as they were within it, the humans’ lives would practically never be eroded. Because there, of course, were limits to even the blocking; even if it wouldn’t work forever, not one person had complained about being in a poor physical condition yet.

“That’s not a ‘Common Technique’, is it?”

“Mm. My special characteristic is that my sensing ability of spirit energy is of a somewhat higher degree, but it wasn’t enough to get a name. That was simply a technique. Half of that referred to the humans’ inorganic necromancy.”

It kept back the flow of spirit energy, giving it directionality to release it in another direction, she said. Originally, it seemed that it was not a barrier to be used in such a

way, but instead one to aid fighting.

That was right; surely, if there was a person who could control the flow of spirit energy, organic necromancy would be more powerful, and they would also be able to prevent the enemy's evocations to some extent. Fiene, who had lived in both the Elven society and the human society, had probably cultivated her techniques within both of them.

"Well, it's thanks to your cooperation that such a strong fella has been created, you know?"

"No, not really..."

Ellis had, pretty much, helped too. By using the Unique Vocation "Crimson-Stained Water Lily" – Ellis' blood – as a catalyst, which had the great power of taking in and storing spirit energy, it was possible to strengthen the power of the barrier.

"The one who created the barrier was not me, but you, Fiene. I wouldn't have been able to do anything."

To speak of the truth, she would have been able to save a very small amount of people. It was the treatment that she once had performed on Imina. It was a method to etch Ellis' blood on the other person's skin, much similar to a tattoo, which then would absorb the superfluous spirit energy. So to speak, a lightning rod of spirit energy.

However, it also gave the other party's body scars that would not disappear, and the chances were high that the body would reject it afterwards. She wanted to avoid it if possible. The burden that Ellis herself bore was heavy in the first place, so there also was a limit to the amount that could be done. By using that method, the best she could do would be to only save Milifica and the others.

And, for arguments' sake, she couldn't help but do it – thinking about being driven into a situation where she could do nothing but save a very small amount of people, she could not choose but to thank Fiene.

In other words, she would have to let people die without helping. Those nice people which they had encountered at great pains, Ziadrene, Fiene, and their subordinates.

"I get what you're thinking. If I weren't here, or something like that?"

She wondered if her depressed expression had shown.

Fiene tapped her on the head.

“You’re a gentle child, you are.”

And she faintly smiled.

“But, there’s nothing to worry about. Because it’s the same for me. There’s a limit to the number of people that can be saved, and in that case you need to chose the ones that you must save. This time, it just so happens that we don’t have to decide the people that can be saved before we need to. Though that too is a cruel conversation... To be honest, I am happy that those cowards scurried away and quickly died.”

She was startled at those words.

Yes. Six days ago, when the opinions on what to do after that had split – and the only ones who had remained were the six with Ellis and Ziadrene’s party. Probably, it was for that reason that Fiene revealed her identity. Precisely because only the trustworthy people remained, she felt like helping everyone as an Elf.

Conversely, what should I do? Surely Fiene felt the same. I couldn’t say that I was an Elf in front of treacherous company.

“I don’t really think that it was that... fortunate.”

“Ha, like I would care. Owing to that, we helped people important to us.”

I have no intention to mock that group which strived to be the first out of the forest. *However, on the one hand, she thought. If they had believed in them to the degree that they obediently followed Milifica’s words – if they had become comrades in the true meaning of the word, neither I nor Fiene probably would have hesitated to untie our hair in front of them. Even if I think about from now, it’s an unavoidable matter.*

Therefore she changed the topic.

“Well, I have finally understood the reason. Always, from when we arrived at the Order of Chivalry... I thought about why you guys, Fiene, did us good.”

Imina also was curious. Ziadrene was a former thief, and he said that he hated the nobility, Yet he followed the brains, the royal Milifica, and the reason was unknown-. In reality, everyone in Ziadrene’s party were kind even if there weren’t any certain

reason to a convincing extent.

She thought that they would have an excessive amount of consideration. They were too helpful, in various ways. They acted together with them as to not be blamed by the other group members, they gave practice to them so that they could survive on the battlefield, and when it was proposed, they became their backers.

Everything was due to the bond between Ellis and Fiene.

Because Fiene was an Elf, and noticed Ellis' identity. Therefore, as they were in a relationship where they had the same circumstances, they were accommodated.

However, Fiene shook her head at Ellis, who was thinking like that with shining eyes.

“A reason, you say. Sorry, but it’s not like you think.”

“Huh...?”

“To be honest, it wasn’t because you were of the same tribe that I did something special. At first, I did not care at all about your circumstances. When I saw those kids with guts of steel I understood, and that’s why I liked them, but... that was Princess Milifica together with that young girl Raimi. It was only to you that I didn’t hold any particular emotions.”

“Even if we’re the same, Elves, you say?”

“Ah, that’s unrelated to me.”

With a somehow indignant face, Fiene averted her face.

Suddenly resuming the drawing of water from the branch, which she had only tampered with in diversion, she bluntly declared – as if speaking to someone who wasn’t there.

“When I had abandoned my village, it was when you still hadn’t been born. Long, long before this war had begun, I lived in a human society.”

Well, those who were thieves were but the black sheep of society. While laughing at herself,

“I hate myself, who is an Elf, and I hate the Elves. Therefore I do not have any strong feelings while meeting someone of the same tribe. Though before the war, I have met them once or twice. But I pretended not to recognize them, you see. I wonder if this was good enough for even a conversation.”

“Then, in that case, why were you...”

Fiene spoke of a surprising thing.

“The one who decided that wasn’t me. It was that person. And the one which that person supported wasn’t you. It’s that boy-companion of yours.”

“Ziadrene had, you say?”

The reason for why she did them well was not because Fiene and Ellis were of the same race.

Was it because Ziadrene held some kind of emotional attachment to Imina-?

“When I heard that, I too understood. Our children too. Therefore you guys are precious comrades to us. That’s how it is.”

However, when Fiene said that, Ellis understood even less.

“By ‘that’, what do you mean? What is Ziadrene thinking of, about Imina...”

“I cannot speak from my own mouth of my own accord. I will be scolded by him.”

While Fiene shrugged her shoulders, she gradually lifted her face and looked toward Ellis. The sullen face from a little while ago was gone, and her mood was completely healed. However, seeing the opposite from her, that Ellis’ complexion was poor, she guessed right away.

“Sorry, I spoke unkindly.”

Interrupting her work, she approached Ellis, and patted her head in turn.

“Don’t make that sour face. I do hate Elves a lot, but even so, I don’t particularly hate you. When we spoke about the tribes, I just vented my anger on them, you see.”

“Err, um...”

“You, do you like your village, and your brethren?”

She was taken aback at those words.

“No, I don’t like them. But...”

“Is it different from hate?”

“Yes.”

Indeed.

She could not declare that she loathed them.

Now, when they were drawing water and picking berries and nuts in the “Elven Forest” in the same manner as when she was living in an Elven Village, she felt nostalgia. The idea of homesickness welled up. There were a lot of friends that she had good relations with. She wondered what on Earth they were doing in that moment.

“Then, why are you here? Together with humans, pretending to be human, entering the human army... What the fuck do you want to do?”

“I...”

She hesitated a little, if she were to speak frankly or not. That was because it was a matter which affected Ellis’ – no, Ellis and the others’ deep interiors. However, a little while later, she had decided. She thought that it wasn’t an inquiry that could be answered with smoke and mirrors.

Ellis spoke.

“It’s because I want to stay with Imina. That is why I cast away the village. I do not regret it. Because granting that person’s wish, is my wish too.”

Fiene inquired, once again.

“What is that boy’s wish?”

“It is to destroy the Elven Village.”

Ellis replied.

“For what reason does that boy wish for that?”

“It’s because the Elves destroyed his hometown. Because they killed his family.”

As if challenging her.

“That is the matters of that boy alone, and is unrelated to you, right?”

“The ones which destroyed his hometown is my family. The one who murdered his family was my brother. And his birthplace and family is my birthplace and family too.”

As if fighting her.

“That’s quite a warped story. More than than the village that you were born in, would you rather choose the fake family in a village that you had settled down in as a guest?”

“Rather than the village, I have chosen him. That is all.”

As if opposing her,

“Why? Are there any merits of you casting away your village for that human?”

“There are! That’s...”

As if resisting her,

“That’s because I love everything about Imina. Because Imina is the most important to me!”

And, as if crying at her.

Ellis’ tone of voice grew sharp before she knew it. In her gaze was sharpness. Firmly grasping her fists, she declared, roughening up her voice.

For a short while, all was silent.

Before long, Fiene spoke to Ellis, who threw her gaze at her, her lips gnashing together,

“...I see.”

Muttering a few words and nodding – and then, she smiled and spoke.

“Well, yer the same as me.”

“Huh...?”

Fiene’s broad smile was slightly different from the way of laughter that Ellis had seen thus far. Rather than sex appeal, she had more heartiness; rather than being slovenly, she was at ease.

“You fell in love, didn’tya? It can’t be helped.”

Yes. That way of laughing was just like Ziadrene–.

Her cheeks suddenly grew hot.

It was not because her feelings toward Imina were pointed out again. She was exposed by the depth of Fiene’s feelings.



How long would they have needed to spend together, for their smiles to resemble each other's to that extent? They were not related by blood, their gender and even species differed, not to mention that their faces differed so much that they could be said to be exact opposites – how much would they need to love each other, how much would they need to continue thinking about each other, for their faces to become the same like that?

“For me, you being of the same race is not why I support you. But, I will support you. Because I like women who have fallen in love and are devoted to a man, you know.”

She, once again, caressed Ellis' head. A touch that was careless in its forcibility, yet transmitting affectionate feelings.

—Ah, yes.

From the very beginning, she had understood it. That both she and Ellis held the same type of feelings. That Ellis was about to depart on the same journey that she once had walked.

“Revenge... And furthermore, to your race, you say. Being a fugitive thief was quite serious too, but you seem to be struggling a lot more than we have.”

And, while that was the same, the hardships were even more grim.

“But, you can't lose. The happiness which is close to a man that falls in love does not change, whatever path you may take. If the man falls in love with you, all the more.”

In addition, he worried about her. Worrying about Ellis, who was assailed by homesickness and nostalgia, he breathed life into her. If her birthplace pulled her sleeves, she would lose sight of the important things—.

“Yes.”

Her cheeks once again were dyed. The flush this time was because she thought of Imina.

While gazing down on Ellis, who was somehow dazzling, Fiene smiled with her whole face.

“All right. Well, let's return soon, when that leather bag is full. The time's about when the men are hungry, so we'll need to make the meals. Even though the ingredients are

disgusting things from our hometown, cheer up your boy's heart with your beloved Preadone-style flavours."

"Yes!"

Where sugar, berries, and nuts were characteristic, Imina's mother's – the flavours of Lill.

There were a great amount of berries and nuts. While, as one would expect, it was impossible to procure sugar, one could add sweetness by using maple sap.

Fiene nonchalantly grasped Ellis' hand. So, Ellis squeezed back. Linking their hands as if they were mother and daughter, or sister and sister, they smiled, walking their way back.

While Ellis was growing aware that she too could laugh like a girl, resembling the person that she loved.



Morning came, finally breaking into the seventh day.

Just while it was dawning, having confirming with the guards, he was told that the girl and the others' return hadn't been confirmed yet. The guards spoke words of anxiety about the Commander's well-being as if to consult the Vice-Commander. Saying things like, "*There's still hope, don't be discouraged*".

Therefore he responded. "*Thank you*" – but it was like that his inner feelings were to the contrary.

Like that, Amaïz Julieta left behind the guardroom, his mood enlivened.

If he were to speak honestly, a gloomy mood had continued since a while ago. Because, if they by some stroke of luck were to return alive, Amaïz would never peacefully feel sorry.

Even if it was a trap, the one who had arranged it would be obvious to Milifica and the others, who had been set up. And, coincident with the course of the plan, it would be clearly evident that not only Amaïz – but also General Dali and the Elves were in a cooperative relationship.

They might be able to insist that there was no evidence. However, there was already no meaning in insisting it. Without a pretext becoming public, they couldn't cope with it, and so on; they were already long past that kind of phase. Of course, the one which had stepped over the boundary line was him, so he could not complain. Setting aside General Dali, Amaïz would certainly be killed behind the scenes.

In any case, I think that today is the last day that I will continue to hold those worries.

At any rate, six days. The current day was the seventh.

There was a mountain of reasons for why they would be unable to survive.

To begin with, the spirit energy. Although there were individual tolerances in terms of resistance, if one were exposed to the thick spirit energy of the "Elven Village", it would be impossible for there to be humans that would survive even after six days. Naturally, Demons and magical beasts also run rampant in the depths of the forest. Some of the spirit flowers and spirit trees, which had grown in a strange way, had even moved and assaulted prey. And, they came swooping down from the depths of the thickets and the darkness, day and night. Viewing a place that seemed to be good from above and fighting enemies there were two completely different matters.

In addition, they would not be able to secure sufficient amounts of food, not to mention water, in the depths of the forest. It was natural, because the forest was created in a place with neither rivers nor springs. Even if they were to hunt magical beasts and pick berries and nuts, only the water would be futile. Under those circumstances, they wouldn't be able to endure until the third day.

For argument's sake, even in the unlikely event that they would be able to solve all those questions in some way; enduring the dense spirit energy, repelling the Demons and magical beasts entirely, securing a source of water and satiating their hunger.

Still, as the morning in question elapsed, survival was hopeless.

In the end, the greatest insurance was set in motion from the day in question.

Within the forest, which stretched about one kilometre in every direction, a barrier that confined people had been formed. Ingeniously modifying the trees that lined the forest, it manipulated the scenery so that it became difficult to walk straight. That was organic necromancy. An invocation that human beings weren't capable of doing, it affected the living.

In other words, there was a Lord within that forest.

It was not something vulgar like a Demon or a magical beast. It was someone who treated the monsters as livestock – of a fearsome race which held the power to easily take on and defeat a Company of One Hundred, alone. He was supposed to move seven days after he had produced the forest – in other words, the day in question.

Searching the depths of the woods, completely destroying the survivors if there were any. Those were the contents of the contract that General Dali had concluded with the other party.

Amaïz was not told when during the day it was supposed to be. It could be during sunset, or it could already have been carried out. However, even so, it was already over. As soon as it was finished, they would receive a report. If he were to hear that, the load on Amaïz's shoulders would completely disappear.

If it was possible to dispose of Milifica, General Dali would also become quiet for the time being. At least, there wouldn't be any sinister orders coming to Amaïz himself for a while.

He thought that he would sleep with a woman that evening, for the first time in a while. How about going over to the brother at the foot of the mountain and getting the most expensive one? He would receive a great reward. Even if he wasted a little, punishment would not be handed down on him.

However, first he had to refresh his head, which was exhausted from the lack of sleep. Last night, he, in his anticipation and anxiety, had spent the night without napping even once. Though it was the hour when the day was to start from then on, he could at least sleep soundly for the afternoon.

As Amaïz returned home to his room in the lodging house, he took the liquor bottle which was placed on the table in his hands. It was not the watery ale which he had constantly drunk in order to distract his anxiety since evening, but a high-percentage, expensive, aged alcohol. If one were to slam two or three cups, one would surely fall asleep in a good mood.

He produced a glass, opened the bottle and poured it, and drank it slowly while sitting down on the bed. While feeling the fragrant scent along with the stimulus of alcohol, he tilted the cup, letting the ecstasy permeate his insides.

When he just had finished off half of it into his stomach, he opened his mouth and exhaled – it was delicious. It had been a long time since he had drunk alcohol that good.

Amaïz closed his eyes in that same posture, and accepted the euphoria that spread throughout his entire body with the alcohol. Aiding the relief, it numbed the centre of his head, and it seemed that he would lose consciousness were he to lose focus. And, there was no reason to not lose focus. Therefore, he lost it.

The glass slipped out of his hand, breaking.

The sound of the scattered pieces of glass and alcohol seemed to be a lullaby, so he thought that he could postpone the cleaning for a while. His body felt good as it lost strength and collapsed. Even if he were to collapse on the floor and not the bed, even if he were to intensely bang his head on the stone floor, even if a fragment of the broken glass were to pierce his cheek, he felt comfortable.

His dissolving consciousness did not even feel the malaise that something was strange.

Amaïz did not move at all, in that unnatural posture. There were no sleeping breaths. There was no heartbeat. The poison, which was poured into his alcohol, rapidly stopped his life.

Amaïz Julieta had died without even noticing that there was a piece of paper in the drawer of his official desk named “Will”, of which he had no memory of writing.



While eating and sleeping in the depths of the forest, he remembered the four years that he had secluded himself in the mountain.

However, from those times, Imina's hatred and urge to kill was pressing. It was a feeling that, rather from it arising from his back, was whispering from next to him.

It was natural. Where he was, was not the countryside where the animals lived, but the “Elven Forest” where the Demons and magical beasts strode. And, he was not practicing, focusing on his revenge to come, because he was instead in the middle of revenge, in the enemy's stomach – because they at the current time were trying to bite a hole in the enemy's stomach.

In the morning which greeted the seventh day since they had been confined, it made an appearance.

It was neither a Demon nor a magical beast – it was a soldier of the Elven Tribe. While the visit was sudden, it was also one that was coincident with their expectations. If they were to speak the truth, it was a matter where they already knew where it would come.

An invocation had been set in the depths of the forest in order to lead those which were in the middle astray. It was not difficult to leave a limited, finite space. Because there was, in any case, a good prospect if they were to spread out a rope and create landmarks.

However, what Imina and the others had fallen into was a state of affairs where they had arrived at their original position before they knew it, even though they should have been walking straight ahead. It could not only be explained by a disrupted sense of orientation peculiar to the depths of the forest. It was natural to think that the walking road and the scenery ahead was manipulated, giving them the illusion that they were advancing straight ahead. That could not be done naturally. There was a need to successively interact with every trend of the other party.

If that was the case, the practitioner would always be in the forest. And, if everyone were to continue to survive, it would positively grow tired of waiting and make an appearance. Imina and the others had predicted that, and had aimed at precisely that.

Ceasing their random loitering, they built a campground at their position, maintaining themselves at a narrow position where they never could lose sight of each other.

It was thanks to Ellis and Fiene's invocations that they could keep on living like that for about seven days. And, the organic necromancy of the two – that both of them there were Elves, surely must have been a miscalculation for him. The one who patiently endured was, rather, the enemy.

“It finally came out, did it. I've been waiting.”

Imina laughed at the Elf which stood ten metres ahead of him in bare enmity.

It was early morning, when the dawn just had broken. Imina had just shifted with Fream to stand guard. His comrades had not yet gotten out from bed, but they would wake up if he were to shout once.

Anyhow, it's good luck that this guy came when I stood watch.

Imina slowly drew his sword. He set a natural posture, relaxing.

The opponent did not move. While keeping the distance with a vigilant look on his face, it glared at him – truly, with that, who would know which side was the one which attacked first?

“As for me, I would like you to give your name if it's possible.”

That Elf was a boy. He seemed to still be young. Seventeen, or eighteen? Although, seeing as the outward appearances of the Elves were generally lower than their actual age, he could have been about twenty. His rather short, arranged, silver hair and his well-proportioned facial features truly were beautiful like the Elven Tribe, as if he were a water lily in a dense forest.

He did not remember his face. In other words, he was not one of the bastards at the village of Salaïd, and not his direct enemy.

“...Dierich.”

The voice that he gave out was lower than his appearance implied.

“Dierich, you say. What's that? Your personal name, or your family name?”

It wasn't like Imina remembered all sixteen of the Elven clans. Besides, it was hard to judge whether it was a given name or surname even if one were to only listen to the sounds of the culture of a different tribe.

However, the Elf did not respond to Imina's question. On the contrary, he asked instead.

“Where's Lady Ellis?”

Within his voice – could be surmised nuances of hatred.

“Do you know about Ellis?”

“I asked where the fuck she was!”

He shortly barked. That time was of clear resentment.

Therefore Imina called out to his behind.

“Righty-ho. Come out!”

“...Um.”

The place where Imina kept watch and the campground was separated by a thicket. Making a rustling sound, Ellis slowly appeared. She was taking a nap next to the thicket which was the closest to Imina, who stood watch. Because there was a sign for her to wake up when the Elven boy visited, she had sent a signal that she was on alert with her hand.

“Lady Ellis!”

The boy shouted, as though he had been overcome by emotion,

“Dierich, is it. It’s been a long time.”

Ellis responded with a voice that seemed to subdue her feelings.

“Do you know each other?”

“Yup. It’s Dierich Finiendveil... A child of the Endveil clan.”

I see, so he’s a guy that’s related to her.

In other words, that guy too was of the Endveil clan.

If that was the case, he was to be killed.



Imina's intent to kill whispered in his ear, in order to entice him.

Kill him. Shred him up. Decapitating him, making his entire body into pieces, setting fire to him, making him into ashes along with the forest-.

A sweet impulse ran about the behind of his cranium. If he were to surrender his body like that, he would surely feel pleasant. However, Imina endured that intent to kill, as if crushing a fly which flew about.

Adjusting his breathing, he held down his feet, which seemed to throw themselves upon the enemy as they pleased. Even if he were to start the fight at that moment, there would be no benefit for his side. To say nothing of that Imina was already not only just fighting with Ellis any more.

They had their comrades behind them. Therefore, what they had to think about first, would be to get them out of there alive. Besides, even if he was of the Endveil clan, the opponent was not an immediate enemy. It would be too much of a foolish act to plunge in at only his own convenience, according to his impulses.

The Elven boy – Dierich – did not notice Imina's struggle, only looking at Ellis. He cried out as if grieving with a sad expression on his face.

“Why, Lady Ellis! Why are you doing that in such a place? I... do you understand my feelings when I saw you, amongst the corralled enemy!? The obvious thoughts that I was happy to see you alive, but they were painted over by bafflement, my thoughts were!”

“Certainly, I am supposed to have died.”

“The Clan Elders believe so, but... I believed that you definitely were alive somewhere. Nevertheless... Of all things, you being alive in here of all places!”

“It's as my brother says. Ellis Endveil is dead.”

The opposite of Dierich's passion, Ellis' answer was curt.

“I know that you thought that the Clan's ties and the Clan House was important. You've always been like that, since childhood. But, I already have nothing to do with the Endveil. Not just Endveil... I have nothing to do with the Elven Tribe. Therefore, I do not feel thankful anymore for those feelings of yours, nor the worries.”

Those cold, forsaking words probably were for Dierich's sake too.

And, at the same time, it was also to instruct him–.

Ellis stood next to Imina, her fingers entwined around his.

"You shouldn't think that you are my family. For I have forsaken both the Clan and the Elven Tribe."

There was silence for a short while.

Five, or ten, seconds – before long, Dierich raised his head, which had been facing down,

"...Deplorable."

He spat out a mutter.

"That nonsense, kidnapped by humans, is. Is he the one who is deceiving you? What on earth do you like about one of that lowly, savage tribe? Have you been raped, your emotions changing through that?"

"What are you talking about?"

In response to that abuse, Ellis' presence grew sharper. Was the reason for why she got angry because she was thrown curse words? Or, was it because he insulted Imina?

"At least, when my father was alive, you didn't say things that looked down on humans, did you. You did not stop me and my brother from going out and playing in Salaid... That being the case, Dierich, when on Earth did you start to think like that?"

Or, was he possibly mourning a acquaintance and hometown which had changed–?

Dierich did not answer her, who demanded an explanation.

What he threw at her was, instead of a reply, an interruption that couldn't be helped.

"You should feel ashamed. What you are doing is equal to bestiality."

"...Don't you fucking make fun of me, you little shit!"

And Ellis' rage satiated Imina's intent to kill before it came forth.

"It's because you bastards are like that! It is because you bastards say those kinds of things that the war has started! Because you bastards have that kind of attitude, the village has grown strange! It's because you bastards think like that! Because my brother did those kinds of things, Imina lost his family!!"

It was a scream rougher than any of the ones Imina had heard.

However, on the one hand, there was no other way than for it to be touching.

Painful.

Pitiful.

Her sadness – Ellis' grief had become anger and spat out.

"Aren't you the little bitch that doesn't know shame!? It's not the fault of Lilithgrave... it's you bastards' fault! The war started because of you bastards' fucking conceitedness!"

"...Ellis."

Ellis, who screamed as if straining her throat. Imina strongly grasped her hands.

"It's enough. Your feelings aren't conveyed to this little bugger."

Even before Ellis' passion, Dierich did not change his cold gaze.

Because he thought that from the bottom of his heart. That humans were inferior creatures. That Ellis was a woman who had been corrupted. He thought that the feelings and ties which bound together humans and Elves were those of bestiality.

"Imina, I..."

Even at that time, Ellis was still having a crying look on her face. Therefore, he embraced her shoulders. In order to catch her emotions. In order to share her sadness and anger.

"But, it's fine. They're transmitted to me. Is that not enough?"

Because she was saddened for Imina's sake, because she got angry for Imina's sake-.

"Dierich, you say. I understand enough, that you are that kind of person."

Lightly kissing that head of hers, Imina walked one step backwards, toward Ellis' side. In truth, he wanted to avoid battle as much as he could. It was a directive from Milifica.

The enemy Elves were likely moving under agreement with the humans. It was probably due to a conspiracy with Amaïz and General Dali, that they were trapped in that forest. In that case, it could be possible to unravel what kind of agreement it was through dialogue – she thought.

As a godsend, there were two Elves there. She thought that if he were to face Ellis and Fiene, which were of the same race, it was possible that he would, taking precedence over the agreement with General Dali, tell everything. There was also the speculation that they would, on the contrary, possibly be able to escape from the forest with him acting as a guide, if all went well.

"Milifica'thoughts have been rendered useless."

However, honestly, that way was the more convenient one for Imina. He was helped by that guy, who had a depraved nature. Imina was glad that he was an Elven supremacist, with a narrow scope for discussion.

That was because he was going to kill him.

There was no need to interact with him to get information out of him. It would be fine to, just knocking him about, cut his limbs into two or three pieces and make him speak. After he had spoken, beheading him would be fine. He could do that. He would gladly do that. He was a garbage-like bastard who it was appropriate to do those kinds of things to – oh, Imina truly was grateful.

He put his strength into the fingers that grasped the handle of his sword. He bent his knees while stepping on the ground firmly with both feet. He relaxed, deeply inhaling while slightly leaning backwards. Not reserving himself from that behaviour which he had endured until then, he left everything to his heart's content, to the urges to kill which murmured into his ear.

"You said that I was a beast. Then, I'll fucking show you... the battle of beasts!"

-He set himself free.

Shortening the distance which he had leapt beforehand, he swung down his crimson sword.

“Wha...!?”

Dierich opened his eyes wide in astonishment.

Failing to respond to Imina’s first move, his counter was delayed. In other words, he wasn’t using organic necromancy. Which meant that he made light of Imina. Meaning that he, disdaining an inferior race, was negligent.

With a flustered face, he returned back half a pace. Lifting his right arm, he used it as a flesh-and-blood shield in order to stop the blade. In other words, he finally used organic necromancy. However, utilizing it to stiffen the skin and not raise the reaction speed was a stupid plan. Because, Imina’s attack would commence through striking with the edge of the blade.

Doink. As the edge of the sword and the flesh collided, a dull sound resounded in the forest.

“Gah...!”

Dierich frowned. Perhaps not through pain, but through discomfort. A face of bruised self-esteem, that he received a blow from a human, a low existence.

That’s good. As expected, killing him is worthwhile.

“...RaAAAAAwr!”

With that same vigour, he unleashed some indiscriminate shots. Without minding that the blade could snap, even changing the recoil onto force, he frantically thrust his sword.

Three, five, six, seven; after eight strikes, the spirit energy that the sword had accumulated had reached its threshold. In other words, it cut.

So, after the ninth time, it scoopingly struck up from below, aiming at his legs.

One instant. Dierich's gaze growing sharp, the quality of his movements changed.

His organic necromancy had spread out throughout his entire body – diffusing through his insides. Namely, it strengthened all physical abilities, including his physical strength and reaction speed.

His foot, which kicked off the soil, gouged it out greatly. The flash of Imina's sword flew through the sky. The enemy hopped backwards, suddenly accelerating with an optical illusion as if he were teleporting.

“Don't get all too carried away.”

Dierich, who had landed outside of the range of the sword's edge, scowled at Imina,

“I know of the power of that sword of yours, you bastard. The invocation that allows you to split a Demon's body in two with a single slash... If that blade shines, there is no need to helplessly be cut by it.”

“If you say that, it means that you have been peeking at us all the time. Or, did you perhaps ask people to tell you before the fact? By that inferior race which you detest.”

It was certain that he was in contact with General Dali. Then it wasn't surprising that the information on Imina's sword was missing. However – it was fragmentary – ever since he had come to the Great Fortress, he had only ever used the sword attack which converted impact into destructive force. “Exellis” was only thought of as a magic sword where an uncommon invocation was loaded.

Of course, if the information were known, it would become harder.

“Cheap provocations.”

Dierich provokingly snorted.

“You see? Because you're growing proud from that simple child's play, you, you little bitch are of an inferior tribe. Organic necromancy... Because you can't manipulate the spirit energy by yourself, you're putting it in materials as a replacement, right? The imitation of our necromancy is all too childish, far too childish.”

Even while saying that Imina had spoken cheap provocations, what showed on his face was his true irritability. Besides, it was a situation where it seemed that if he didn't

stand up, he wouldn't be satisfied.

Therefore, Imina provoked him again. He sneered, his face showing that there was more to come.

"Hah, well, I think that I am more superior than a little lost kid."

"Gah... Don't you fucking look down on me, you little squawking monkey!"

The enemy was quite enraged.

"If you want to see it that fucking much, I'll fucking show you all right! The genuine invocations that us noble Elves use!"

Enraged – he became serious. As if embracing the surrounding air, he stretched out both hands. Moreover, a sound, as if responding to that As if dry things were gathered up and mixed around, as if many large insects squirmed around; in other words, as if the foliage rustled.

The following moment, incessant attacks poured down from above.

Piercingly encircling Imina and expanding, a line of spears made of spirit trees attacked.

"Rah!"

As one would expect, not everything could be dodged. Consequently, he swept them aside with Exellis.

Using the power that the sword had accumulated. Though the trees were so hard that one probably wouldn't think of them as such, the crimson light of destruction defiantly cut the orbiting branches into pieces.

Nevertheless, as he was unable to drop everything, several branches pierced his shoulders, but forcibly withdrew.

"Haha, what's wrong? Your face's pale!"

Dierich smiled, as if he was happy that he could inflict injury on Imina.

"Hey, you've still some way to go!"

The subsequent strike was sent from his front, with no time to spare. There was the indication that, together with the noise of wind, stone-like things were approaching. It probably was nuts – obviously, they were strengthened by an invocation. Faster than arrows, harder than stone. If one were to try to normally eat them, one's teeth would be pierced through.

While holding his sword on the midline, he bent his body and defended.

With a pow-pow-pow-pow-pow, the impact was stronger than expected. His front arms, along with his knees, which couldn't be covered by the blade, were grazed. Tearing his clothes to pieces and passing through his flesh, jabs of sharp pain shot through all over.

“Oioi, what are you doing? Ain't it just a defensive fight!”

While enduring the attack, Imina clicked his tongue in his mind.

–Saying that he truly was doing whatever he pleased.

If he thought that he was prevailing, that was it. Imina was exasperated at hearing one of the high-class tribe. He laughed, pettily. He remembered hearing Ellis, who repeatedly had shouted at that guy that it was because he was that way.

That just hit the mark.

Because he was that way – because he disdained humans in that way. Because he overestimated his own ability in that way. Because he, in that way, faced a fight with a shallow mind – his carpet would be pulled from under.

It was expected to become that kind of battle.

Dierich's specialty was, in other words, to manipulate vegetation.

That the seeds, which had been inserted into the Demons and the magical beasts' bodies, sprouted all at once, that the growth of the plants was encouraged which transformed them into part of the “Elven Forest”, and that Imina and the others had lost their way inside the “Elven Forest” that they were imprisoned in – everything was the result of him having the power that could utilise the spirit flowers and spirit trees as he pleased.

Then, it would be obvious that he would use that specialty even in times of battle.

Looking from the humans' perspective, it was an outrageous power. It even seemed to be an omnipotent power which could do everything. However, though it seemed to be so at first sight, spiritualism was a technology, and that Elf wasn't omnipotent.

There was a theory, there was a structure, there were rules, and, furthermore, there were limits. A boundary line, of the scope of what you could or couldn't do, would definitely exist somewhere. And, along with Imina, there were comrades which could see them.

A colleague who also was an Elf, who understood organic necromancy.

“Fiene!”

He shouted, while he was struck by the stones of nuts. Ahead – even further, toward the space behind Dierich.

“Up to ya!”

“Okey-dokey!”

Immediately following, one could hear an interlude-esque voice; the energetic and happy reply came from the depths of the forest.

“Wha...!?”

The attack which was tormenting Imina – the stones of nuts – suddenly stopped.

Dierich looked around in amazement.

The one who slowly made an appearance from the depths of the thicket was a beautiful woman in the prime of her age. The slovenly figure, which listlessly stood up, clad in unladylike clothes that exposed too much, looked as if she was a prostitute. And, what extended, peeking through both sides of her long, slouching black hair were long, sharp ears.

“Your manners are bad. Walnuts aren't to throw at people, they're things to roast and eat.”

Laughing jokingly, she softly stroked the trees which Dierich had manipulated until then with the palm of her hand.

“You bitch... You dammed up my spirit energy!”

Fiene shrugged her shoulders at his thundering shout, which was full of anger.

“Rather than men who are like you, I prefer that boy over there.”

Everyone among the Elves could handle fundamental organic necromancy. The manipulation of plants was fundamental.

Of course, everyone had their strong and weak points, so Fiene was not as good as Dierich. However, if one were to grasp from which trees the nuts were blown away from, interfering was easy.

It could be inferred in advance that if the enemy was proud of the power to control vegetation, they would use that same power to attack. Therefore for those seven days, they had discussed measures for that. Of course, assuming that they were peeped on from somewhere, they whispered nonchalantly as much as they could.

It would be difficult to deal with humans only. However, they were fortunate that it was an Elf that could use organic necromancy. And the girls – Ellis and Fiene had asserted.

That that guy's invocations weren't that high-class.

That the simultaneous sprouting and explosive growth when the forest had been born probably was through special “Seedlings”. “Seedlings” – though they literally were seedling or seeds of the spirit flowers and spirit trees, the conditions for sprouting and growth speed seemed to be able to be adjusted in various ways through the use of an invocation at the time of germination. Of course, the adjustment of the “Seedlings” required high technique, but it could ultimately be prepared beforehand, and the sprouting itself could be done with a simple operation of spirit energy.

On the other hand, the labyrinth of the forest which caused Imina and the others to go astray was considerably intricate. Finely changing the scenery of their surroundings, gently bending their path while giving them the illusion that they were going straight ahead. Unconcernedly growing landmark-like trees with characteristic shapes and moving those places according to how they walked, erasing the scratches used as

landmarks and moving them into other trees. While trapping them like that repeatedly, it seemed that it was ingeniously manipulating their sense of direction, corralling them.

However, because it was complex, if one were to look at it from the flip side, it was simple work in its modesty. Basically, he could only imprison Imina and the others in that kind of indirect manner. If that person could unrestrictedly control all the vegetation in the forest, there would be no need for them to get lost. It was a story that only could be realised if the density of the plants a few tens of metres in their surroundings were to be stiffened and made into cages, densened above their limits so that they couldn't be cut with a sword.

The attack on Imina was similar. Why did the spears of the branches that Dierich used to attack Imina only come from the upper parts? And why did he only shoot the stones of the nuts that were in front of him? If he truly wanted to bring everyone down, he could enclose them from all directions and the sky, and pour down attacks from every direction so much that they would be impossible to take refuge from. In spite of that, the materials; tree branches, nuts, and berries, existed clearly as far as the eye could see.

The answer was simple.

The effective range of his invocation was comparatively narrow, and there was a limit to the amount of plants that he could control at the same time.

According to Ellis and Fiene – organic necromancy was not in the least an omnipotent tool. It was simply technology. And technology was manifested through a process which accorded to a fixed theory.

First of all, what amounted to the origin of everything was one's own spirit energy.

That was definitely finite, and would be consumed to its limit as one were to continue to use any invocation. If one's spirit energy were to be exhausted, the invocation would not be able to operate. The cause for that was although Ellis' "Crimson-Stained Water Lily" held the ability to snatch away and store other peoples' spirit energy, the time of effect was short.

And, letting the invocation manifest – in brief, creating a phenomenon, meant making the practitioner's spirit energy interfere with another spirit vein.

If it was for strengthening one's physical ability, one would absorb spirit energy from the spirit vein in the ground, and infuse it into one's body.

If it was to manipulate the vegetation, one would transfer one's own spirit energy to interfere with the trees' own spirit energy, and put them under one's own control.

If one would want to transform a human into a Demon, one would need to absorb great amounts of spirit energy from the spirit vein in the ground, and after that, to destroy the shape of the vessel by pouring it into there beyond the maximum amount.

It seemed to people that limitless power could be used, because the way to absorb the large amounts of spirit energy which flowed in the spirit veins in the ground was used to create fuel for the deployment.

However, there was a difference in skill from the practitioner and there.

It was exceedingly difficult to do the operation "To transfer one's own spirit energy into someone else's spirit energy" twice, simultaneously.

For example, if one wanted to transform a human into a Demon, only pouring the "Spirit Energy of Oneself" in there would not suffice. One would need to use the vast "Spirit Energy of the Earth". Therefore, not only connecting the "Spirit Energy of Oneself" and the "Human Spirit Energy", there would be a need for the process to connect the "Spirit Energy of Oneself" and the "Spirit Energy of the Earth", and furthermore to transfer the "Spirit Energy of Oneself" while absorbing the "Spirit Energy of the Earth" and pouring it into the "Human Spirit Energy".

When the Elves transformed the humans or beasts, they used a tool named the "Seed" in order to simplify that complicated process. To sum it up, the "Seeds" were granules of highly-concentrated spirit energy embedded into organic matter, and it would act as a substitute to the procedure of "Absorbing spirit energy from the ground and pouring it into the target", if it was embedded into the body of a living being. The practitioner would only have to let the "Seed" respond to their "Spirit Energy of Oneself".

Performing the process of connecting the spirit energy two times simultaneously would be comparable to writing different sentences with both hands at the same time – Dierich probably was incapable of that parallel work.

Therefore, when manipulating the vegetation, it would be necessary to do it with his

own spirit energy. With only his own spirit energy, there was a limit to the number and scale as to what he could control simultaneously.

And there, there would be a gap to take advantage of.

“Gah... Don’t you fucking underestimate me, traitor!”

While an impatient expression lay on his face, Dierich moved his gaze. It seems that he wanted to change his target of manipulation to another plant. Imina did not know as to which one. However, Fiene did. She was proficient in sensing the flow of spirit energy and decoding it.

“You guys, it’s your turn!”

Fiene sharply shouted. The thickets in the surroundings moved in unison, and figures of people stood up.

They were Imina’s comrades; Milifica, Fream, Sashtal, and Raimi. In addition, Ziadrene’s gang. While Dierich had carelessly shouted abuse, they had secretly got out of bed and formed a battle formation.

“You, first on the right!”

Fiene gave instructions to Ziadrene.

“Aye!”

Ziadrene swung his great hatchet, a spirit energy tube loaded within, and drove his blade into the first tree on the right. The invocation that he had loaded was a highly-concentrated poison. The poison was, in brief, a drug that inhibited the biological activities, which meant that the flow of spirit energy would go out of order.

He did not know what command Dierich has assigned to it. However, after the foliage seemed to rustle and squirm, and the trunk had become crooked, the tree on the right flatly stopped moving.

“Drat!”

There was no time for Dierich to think of a reason for why his invocation had failed. While clicking his tongue, even as he turned his line of sight to the next tree,

“Princess, the maple on the opposite of the slanted tree!”

“Is it this one?”

“That’s it, do it!”

“Understood!”

Milifica unsheathed her knight sword, the “Trace of Heavenly Lightning’s Flash”, and held it, aiming at the eye; while she invoked the invocation that she had prepared, she swung it downward with the sound of cutting through cloth. That was probably a compound invocation of high heat and oscillation. The thick trees, which could have the girth of a human body, were bisected in the middle and fell down on the ground with a smell of burning, while black smoke rose up.

“Don’t you, fucking, look down...!”

Dierich did not give up. He immediately tried to manipulate other plants.

However, that too was in vain.

“Samz and Ashley, the oak behind you, do it together!”

“Aye, young lady!”

Together with a drum-like answer, Ziadrene’s two subordinates wielded their swords. It wasn’t immediate, so the branches of the oak started to rustle, but even so it was but a few seconds. The shot of fire from a sword hindered the attack of the branches, while the poison from an axe which was swung down on the trunk close to the ground rotted the roots.

“Shit, shit, shit, shit, those fucking low-lifes!”

Dierich spat out abuse with a deep-red face.

It was natural. All of the attacks which were supposed to have begun had been entirely crushed just before. Furthermore, by the hands of those inferior creatures which he despised.

He was probably not self-aware. That all of the irritation that he had sensed, that

contempt – in other words, his disdain facing the humans, had occurred because he had thought that he was of a better race.

The arrogance, that a group of mere humans could be crushed with just one Elf.

The carelessness, that there was no way that mere humans could defeat his invocations.

The dissatisfaction, that he had been done in by mere humans.

The resentment, to the fact that he had been chased into a predicament by mere humans.

Therefore, Imina looked at Dierich, who behaved like that, and prepared his sword, enshrouded in bloodlust. Stubbornly quiet, his presence was calm, in the gap where that bastard was being preoccupied with mere humans.

He turned around, and glanced at Ellis, who was next to him.

She nodded. Somewhat sadly, resignedly.

That was surely at the fact that the boy, who held the same blood as her, behaved like that – she felt pity and disdain at exposing his disgraceful display, which was filled with contempt toward humans.

Dierich was of the Endveil clan. There was no doubt that Ellis Endveil had associated with him since she was a child. Imina himself had faint feelings of guilt to kill acquaintances of her family. However, regarding him killing Dierich, there was nothing against it. It was because the gentle Ellis would be troubled through him being cut down – through Imina cutting him down.

However, Imina had the duty to accept and endure Ellis' heartache. He had the resolution to put all of her discord, including her pain, into wielding his sword. Returning Ellis' nod, he bent his knees and leapt.

His rapid advance was instantaneous. His approach was swift. His urge to kill was silent. The opponent did not see Imina, devoted to the idea that his invocations had been obstructed.

The sword blade shone a faint red. It has absorbed the spirit energy from the stones

of the nuts that Dierich just had thrown. It was by no means a strong light. However, the threshold had been exceeded.

Nuts. Though Imina hadn't seen them, they seemed to be walnuts.

He wondered if Dierich knew. Lill, Imina's mother's, specialty cooking had been a bread in which walnuts had been kneaded. Ellis was holding those flavours, which she had inherited from Lill, very precious.

Therefore – that was the punishment for them trampling her feelings underfoot.

“Ah...!?”

Dierich finally recognized the presence of Imina, who had entered during that slight gap.

Too slow.

Finally, he thought about spitting out yet another word of abuse, but he stopped. He had nothing to say. There were no words that he needed to say to that bastard.

Imina followed through with a downward strike from his crimson falchion – “Exellis”.

The traces of the sword lined up perfectly with the enemy's nape, and red light vividly bisected his neck.

With no scream during his moment of death, his head danced in midair.



The head, which Imina had cut, dropped into the grass while rotating.

While the body which once was Dierich Finiendveil spouted blood from its opening, he was killed with a smash; turning up his face as he parted with his control and existence.

Ellis watched that entire chain of events without parting her eyes.

To be accurate – she gazed so that she wouldn't fail to notice Imina's appearance, who had killed the enemy. Because that was his long-cherished desire, and at the same time, his sin. Her emotions were complex. They, coming and going in her chest,

tormented Ellis as if they couldn't be helped.

It was no wonder. Because a beloved person of hers had slayed an acquaintance which she had known since she was a child. Her heart was wounded, whatever side she stood on. She wanted to scream "*Why is it like this?*".

However, Ellis had to choose on which side to stand. And what she had chosen, was the side of the one which she loved. She had concluded that someone of the same tribe as her was an opponent, and backed the intent to kill of her loved one.

In that case, Ellis too had to shoulder the sin that he had murdered someone related to Ellis. Just like when, four years ago – when her brother and his clansmen had killed her loved one and his family.

"...Imina."

Approaching Imina, who, held his sword as he looked over Dierich, she touched his back.

"Any wounds, are you OK?"

He had been injured all around. His life was not in danger, but his wounds were by no means shallow. Each one seemed to be painful.

"Oh, no problems."

Imina laughed. Those eyes of his silently inquired. Whether Ellis was fine too. Whether she was able to endure not the wounds on her body – but rather, the pain in her heart. She was grateful that his feelings were glad. She thought that she was on that side because the one she loved was concerned about Ellis like that. Not the side of the Elves, but on Imina's.

Therefore she did not see Dierich's dead body.

While she recalled the memories which ran wild, where she was together with him in the Elven Tribe, she disregarded those strong feelings. Yes – those things were but strong feelings. The reason was because he was a person who held Imina in contempt. Because he was a person which abused Ellis' feelings with the most horrible words.



Gently stroking Ellis' head, Imina turned toward his behind.

"Milifica, with this it's the end... Let's escape, from here."

"Yes. Thank you, Imina. Also, Fiene and Ellis, and naturally you group members. Not only the battle... For these six days, you've endured well."

Everyone cheered at Milifica's thanks.

There was a person which shouted that they would drink like fish when they got back, and there was a person which grumbled that they would go the bath first as they hadn't been able to do anything but wipe down their bodies. There was a person that laughed that he wanted to sleep to his heart's content on a soft bed, and there was somebody that sighed that they wanted to eat proper food. On the other hand, there was a person which teasingly asked with a "Hey!", whether they were discontent with the food that the young lady and young girl had cooked, and there was, apart from that, a person who had said that he was going for women, who was poked by his neighbour with a "*He wasn't to say such things in front of the Princess.*"

Everyone was gaily laughing with a sense of liberation.

Without finding fault in those vulgar words, Milifica looked at everyone with a relieved expression on her face.

The lord of the forest was killed. There was no longer any person to lead them astray from their path.

Because the remnants of Demons and magical beasts still wandered around they could not be negligent, but as long as they advanced ahead in a tight, straight line, they would definitely be able to exit the forest.

There was about one or two hours until they would be able to escape, departing from that place. If there were any grounds for concern, it was about the number of horses. As they had run away during the confusion of battle, or as they had been eaten by Demons or magical beasts, only about three of them remained. It seemed to be slightly difficult, seeing as they had left for the plain.

Of course, the problems piled up even after carrying out a triumphant return, but the first thing was, in any case, that they wanted to savour the joy of being able to survive to their hearts' content in a place where they were able to take a deep breath. Although Fiene's barrier had been reduced, it did not change because of the fact that the spirit energy of the "Elven Forest" wasn't good for the body.

"We will depart after a short break. Everyone, prepare for your withdrawal."

All hands understood Milifica's order, and answered clearly.

Therefore, Imina also returned, in order to put the luggage on the camp site in order. He was reminded that he had to bring back Dierich's head, but he thought that it was fine to pick it up afterwards; with thoughts like those, he was just about to advance forwards,

"Wh...!?"

Abruptly, without previous notice, he felt the chills. Goosebumps, which ran along his back, stiffened his body.

No – it was not anything simple like goosebumps.

Dread, shivering, shock, all of those were driven out from the bottom of his soul. It churned slowly, as if a piece of cutlery was thrust into his heart–.

In other words, it was a sense of intimidation that was from an intent to kill, which wasn't of the common degree.

–Wh, o?

That kind of bloodlust was released. Who exactly was it, that had turned toward them? He turned back, involving both his body and soul. Even a simple act like turning around called for that much effort. He did not know whether his other comrades were aware of that bloodlust, or whether they were really able to keep calm as they noticed. There was not even the space to consider the circumstances.

However, he could only see Ellis, who was just next to him. She was trembling. Her lips turning pale, her complexion did too, as she had a mixed expression of fear and bewilderment on her face.

“Wh... y?”

She murmured.

“Why, in this place?... Uncle.”

The one who stood in front of Ellis’ line of sight was a single man.

His age was in the vicinity of fifty years; he could have passed fifty or not. One could say that he was in the prime of his life. However, his body, which was in casual dress defying his apparent age, was tough; a vigour followed suit that truly could be said to be one of a soldier of long military service.

In spite of him folding his arms, there were no gaps in his posture. On the contrary, one felt that they would be cut down if they just would lose focus for a single second. It could be because of his scars from war, or because of the eye patch which was attached to his right eye. However, the glint in his single eye was sharp yet grim, seemingly pinning down the enemies’ hearts with one glance.

“Ah...”

The moment that he saw that man’s face–.

Imina’s body was assailed by another type of stiffening, completely different from the withering from when he had shivered just before. He knew about that person. He remembered.

No, he couldn’t forget.

There was not even one moment during those four years where he had forgotten. Even in his dreams behind his eyelids, his face – included with that person, their faces.

“That’s my line.”

The man spoke to Ellis.

Like a military man, a low but a carrying voice.

“When I heard from Dierich I thought certainly not, but... what are you doing in such a place, Ellis?”

His voice, which called her name, was over-familiar, yet coercive. That would be natural too. Even among them, he had heard that his relationship to Ellis and Shirjis was very close, by blood. To him, Ellis was his brother's daughter – his niece.

In other words, he was brother to the former Clan Elder, Eiis.

At the same time, the confidant to the current Clan Elder of the Endveil Clan, Shirjis – one petal of the “Six Petals”.

If he wasn't mistaken, his name was,

“Ji Dig... Ji Dig Endveil.”

“And you are... that boy of that time?”

He gazed at Imina, glaring with his singular eye.

“I see, so that's the reason. That's the road that you have chosen, Ellis.”

After he had sighed with an unrefined expression,

“I thought that this was a boring battlefield, but... it is fate that we have met in this unexpected place.”

Ji Dig faintly smiled in self-deprecation. Within that smile was anger and disappointment, and then, a fragment of mercy.



Chapter 10

第十章

愛しいあなたの血を啜る

Chapter 10

Sipping the Blood of His Beloved

Saying "You slipped up, fool"–.

Ji Dig Endveil muttered, while overlooking Dierich's corpse.

His face was grim, his gaze sharp, and his lips gnashed together. While his words were reprimands, they concealed obvious condolences to him, along with remorse to the fact that a young man of the Clan had passed away.

He had that kind of personality since long ago. He was concerned about all the babies that were born with the clan name of Endveil, and so he kept on living for the sake of the future of the Clan as his foremost priority, as he was close to them as if they were his own family.

That was the same as his brother Eiis, or, in other words, Ellis' father.

No – the depth of his emotions could perhaps even surpass Eiis'.

Because Eiis was the Clan Elder and at the same time the king of the Elven Village, he was in the position of considering the future of the tribe as a whole. The king had the duty to treat all sixteen clans equally, and it was not allowed for him to give preferential treatment to his own tribe. Perhaps, he thought that he was to only be concerned about the clan in place of his brother, so that his brother could fulfil his duty as the king of the village.

Therefore, Ji Dig was a strict, yet kind uncle to Ellis.

As a blood relative, as a child of the Clan Elder, ever since she could remember, she had been especially favoured and looked after. Though, rather than Ellis, who was a girl, the boy, Shirjis, liked him. Because he was, even in the village, a swordsman of legendary skill.

Ji Dig was standing in front of her eyes for the first time in four years.

Carrying a sword on his waist, as an enemy of the Imperial Army – as a foe of the one who Ellis loved.

Aside from Imina and the others who stood on guard, Ji Dig squatted down, and patted down the corpse underfoot.

“The funeral comes afterwards, Dierich... You brave soldier of the Endveil.”

Speaking words of appreciation he stood up, and turned to Ellis once more.

“Well. It has been four years, my niece. So it has become a reunion in an unexpected place.”

“Long time no see, Uncle.”

Her voice, which she squeezed out of her throat, trembled. It was because of the tension, and the fear that followed.

It was from the fierceness of the fighting spirit that was released from his body. If he were to do that just a while ago, the magical beasts would, shuddering, have bowed down before him, and the demons would have fled, crying.

When she spent time with him as a relative, she did not notice it. She felt it from the bottom of her heart, meeting him by chance in the battlefield.

However, she could not falter. She could not be reserved. While Ellis was the niece that would be scolded by her uncle, her companion’s life would unmistakably be lost.

“Did you hear about my circumstances from Dierich?”

“Yes, that is so... Regarding this war, that guy was under my command.”

Under the command. In other words,

“So it is you, my Uncle? Why are you exchanging secret agreements with General Dali?”

Scowling, she asked.

The reason for why Ellis and the others had been trapped in the “Small Elven Village” in the first place had been because they had been caught up in Amaïz’s, and also

General Dali's tricks.

If the Lord of the Forest, Dierich, was under the command of Ji Dig, it would be reasonable to think that the one which had colluded with General Dali and ordered that operation was Ji Dig as well.

However, refusing to narrow his eyes, he asked back.

“Secret agreement? What’s that?”

After that, he knit his brows, as if realizing something,

“...Ah, I see, so that’s the reason. It’s got something to do with the plans of that lady-fox”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s not me. From above, I... was simply appointed these tactics by imperial decree. Because the one who was in the suitable role to carry that strategy out was Dierich, I left it to him. The result, was a failure. Of course, I definitely couldn’t imagine that you were here, as an enemy soldier.”

In other words, the secret pact which bound them to the human side,

“Anyhow, assuming there was a secret agreement between us and the humans, I wouldn’t think that it would be strange. The current Khan likes that kind of thing all too much. As if giving the snakes in her bosom some bait, and cutting them not only from the front but also from the inside... Perhaps, we have held those treacherous humans in our arms.”

Radiaata Lilithgrave.

After the death of Ellis' father, that person, who had taken the throne of the Khan, and begun to invade the humans' territory-.

Though she had met her once or twice when she was living in the Village, Ellis had a bad impression. She was a woman who had passed thirty, her good lucks giving off a disgusting impression. She was somewhat creepy, and Ellis did not know her true nature.

“And is that truly all right for you, Uncle?”

Spontaneously remembering the unseasonable, she took one step forward. She could not bear it. She could not give in without saying anything.

“Even if she is the Khan, should you just quietly follow her? Aren’t you just being used as mere pawns, executing what she says without understanding the intentions of her plans?”

The Ji Dig that Ellis knew was a proud swordsman. From her surroundings too, she had heard that he was a noble man who had devotedly tempered his skills of the sword only for the sake of the Clan.

The gash over his right eye was said to have been from a time when the sixteen Clans had been in skirmishes with each other, where he had fought alone in front of ten-odd enemies. For the Endveil, it was a heroic tale.

“In this battle... in this battle, what meaning does that have? How is it justifiable? For what reason must we fight this war?”

Despite that – why? Why was he, at this point of time, fighting that kind of battle in such a place?

“Do you truly wish for such a battle, Uncle? If the Clan Elder... if my father were alive, this war would definitely never have occurred!”

Why he had, four hears ago, fought such a battle in Salaid-.

Ji Dig quietly responded to her half-screamed accusations.

“That is so, just like that.”

But, that was completely different from what Ellis wished for,

“...That would be if Eiis still was alive, yes. However, he is dead. And so, this war blazed up. That is an unalterable fact. Therefore, I will only wield my sword for the Endveil, under that fact.”

Mercilessly, that there was no other way,

“Your older brother, Shirjis, also chose that path. Focusing on the reality, he had to move his best as the Clan Elder, for the sake of the Clan. Different from you, who doesn’t understand what the meaning of Eiis’ death was, not acknowledging that the world has changed.”

Cool-headedly, that there was no other way.

“Gah... that’s.”

She bit her lips.

She could understand what Ji Dig was saying. Because Ellis had continued to think about it since four years ago – the reason why Shirjis had killed Imina and Uruha, and razed Salaid to the ground.

Because her brother had loved everyone in the village just as much as Ellis did. She thought that he was thinking that Imina was his best friend, that he loved Uruha, and that he thought of Lill as his own mother. Therefore, that kind of violence couldn’t just spring up without any reason. He would not do that without thinking about it. Surely, it was for the Endveil Clan.

As his father had died and Radiaata had become the new Khan, the state of affairs of the Elven Village had changed at once. In other words, from coexisting with the humans to hostilities, from nonaggression to invasion.

The Endveil Clan was forced to make a decision.

Would they abide by the intentions of the Khan, Radiaata, or would they succeed the dying wishes of Aiis? If it was the former, they would need to plainly show the fact that they were obedient to her. In the latter case, they would need to fight against the Lilithgrave Clan. The atmospheres, and the ideas from the other sixteen Clans, enveloped the entire Elven Village, and various motives intersected. The result of thinking among them – was that Shirjis was chosen to be the new Clan Elder.

Taking over the Endveil Clan, he severed the ties to the humans.

And, by standing as the very most prominent person suggesting an attack on Salaid, he was guaranteed a political position in the government of Lilithgrave. Everyone in the clan would surely thank him. Therefore, Ji Dig was that imposing. Without caring about Ellis’ reprimands and the likes, even if they were to fight and do as they were

told by Radiaata, simply because it was a matter of the Endveil's pride.

She could understand that it was a bitter decision. She thought that he seemed to be an older brother with a strong sense of responsibility.

“...Still.”

Yes – still.

She raised her face. Instead of biting her lips, she grit her teeth.

“For me... it's different. I was not really allowed to acknowledge my father's death.”

If her older brother were to choose the Endveil clan and truncate the bonds between Imina and the others,

“It has no relation to your father. I am here through my own intent only.”

She had done the opposite to her brother, and that was that.

Choosing her relationship with Imina and discarding the Endveil clan, simply that and nothing else-.

“As for me, I'm already Ellis, nothing more. I'm not one of the Endveil, and not one of the Elves. I am beside this person as a single woman. And I am fighting together with this person!”

“I see.”

Ji Dig answered Ellis' declaration, resolutely to the end.

“I understand the strength of your emotions. Because it has, for that reason, resurrected the dead.”

He spoke as if to blame her.

Naturally, her uncle knew about Ellis' “Common Technique”. Her brother had also seen it with his own eyes when he had killed Imina. Combining her special characteristic “Crimson-Stained Water Lily”

and the fact that a person that was supposed to be dead was in that place – it was a simple guess what Ellis had specifically done to Imina.

However, that was the story if the person which he saw actually was Imina, alive.

Ji Dig did not hide his expression of astonishment.

"Honestly speaking, I was surprised. I didn't think that was Shirjis imagined it. Certainly, if you use your organic necromancy, your chance of success will increase."

Infusing a dead body with a great amount of spirit energy, and resurrecting life.

Among the history of the Elven Tribe, it was not like that there was no precedent that had tried to do that. Rather, it could be said that the past was riddled with precedents. It was a matter of course that one would want to resurrect someone who had died an unforeseen death, as there was such a possibility in the organic necromancy. Even in the fairy-tales of blighted love that were passed down among the Elves, that kind of passage could be called a staple.

However, in both the actual history and the fairy-tales, there was no tale of a revival of a deceased that had succeeded. To be exact – while the resuscitation of the body had succeeded, they had failed to call back the dead. Even if the pulsation of the heart had restarted and the body had come back to life, the heart was broken.

Even if there were memories of their lifetime, they would be vague, their personality would transform, and it was doubtful that their intelligence would be normal. Instead of them having a mind, madness would reside within them, and they would have no reason, but brutality instead.

Therefore, the conclusion to those fairy-tales were always the one of blighted love, and at the same time a caution. Evocations could not resurrect the dead. Even if they were forcefully resurrected, they would live in nothing but sorrow. Therefore, the souls of the dead were to peacefully rest in the spirit vein-.

Of course, Ellis perfectly knew about that matter. Even when she had decided to resurrect Imina, she was ready for the worst result. However, she still risked it. Her own spiritual characteristics – if she were to use her blood, with an uncommonly large amount of spirit energy stored in it, as an intermediary, she wondered if she was able to hold on to his soul as well? She thought that there was value in trying it. Therefore, she did it.

"That boy, is he really normal? It would, indeed, be unimaginable that he is completely unbroken."

Ji Dig asked, with a quizzical expression.

While it was a question that was justified for the Elves, it was nothing more than a question that insulted Imina.

“Surely, it isn’t as if you are laying aside a broken doll next to you so that you feel comforted? Surely, it isn’t as if you have lost your mind and gone crazy, without being able to accept the sadness that you have lost a person that you love, right?”

“...gah!”

At those many words, she fiercely glared at Ji Dig.

Did he think that she never had considered that possibility?

Perhaps she succeeded only in resuscitating Imina’s body, failing to resurrect his spirit?

That he no longer was who he was before, that his soul couldn’t return to the spirit vein and would suffer. Perhaps, after she had broken the heart of the one who she loved, she had brought upon herself the folly of loving a broken doll – did he really think that she never had thought about it?

Four years ago, when Imina just had been resurrected. She thought about it every day.

Anguished, seeing it in nightmares, trapped by anxiety and fear, her heart had been tormented so much that she had vomited blood.

However, there was a person that had saved Ellis from that.

Saying that everything was fine, and that she wasn’t to worry. Someone held Ellis strongly with the same face, the same voice, and the same kindness that he had possessed even before the evocation was performed.

As if to look after Ellis, Imina had walked out one step ahead.

Yes. He had told her.

“Don’t be silly. I’m me.”

Yes – he told her.

Imina smiled.

He was gentle toward Ellis. Coming after, he was fierce toward Ji Dig.

“If I happen to be broken, that is not because of Ellis’ evocation. It’s because of you bastards... The fact that you are alive and breathing is breaking me.”

He did not falter anymore.

Without being timid in front of the pointed sword energy that Ji Dig was releasing, he received it from directly opposite, in order to vent his rage – his fighting spirit and urge to kill.

“For the sake of the Endveil clan? The path that you choose? Like I fucking understand it. The world has changed? That you did your best?... Don’t you fucking speak of those jokes in front of me.”

The vigour, in the arm that he held his sword in, rose. Power was overflowing in the feet that he trampled down on the grass with.

The glinting eyes that he glared at the enemy with, were full of fire.

“When your world changed, why did you need to involve us? Are you saying that slaying us was the very best outcome for you? Even though I don’t know splendid in their wonderfulness your options were... don’t you be fucking proud and boast of the results that you have chosen in front of the very opponents that you crushed underfoot due to those options.”

“Young lad, so the reason for why you’re here is what, revenge?”

Ji Dig calmly took a breath.

“So you threw yourself toward the army because of your revenge to us, and then you had a face-to-face encounter with me in the middle of battle like that... what a fortunate event. However, it may be the decision of destiny. Because the one who resurrected you and brought you to this place is my relative by blood, Ellis.”

As if he was talking to himself.

“In that case, it would be my duty as an uncle to cut off the destiny that is linked to the faults that my niece has perpetrated. I will consign you to oblivion once again, and I will bring my niece back home. And then – shall I leave behind only that kind of good fortune that I have found Ellis, whose whereabouts were unknown?”

As if vowing to himself–.

As he finished speaking, he unsheathed his sword which lay on his waist.

It was a wooden sword, which faintly imitated a straight sword. Of course, it was not just a simple wooden sword. It was named a Mystical Sword. When one scraped down the core of the large oak which mysteriously grew in the middle of the “Elven Village” and spread spirit energy throughout it, it turned into a sharp blade, chopping everything up more brilliant than any of the swords forged by man.

“Don’t you fucking fuck around. I fucking despise that haughty attitude that you bastards have.”

As if to respond, Imina spat that out, as if gnawing his teeth.

Then, readying his sword and bending his knees,

“I will make your arrogant mouth shut the fuck up!”

He sprinted toward Ji Dig with that angry voice.

Ji Dig brilliantly fended off the powerful strikes from above.

Immediately after warding them off, he raised up his mythical sword in a flash. He aimed after Imina’s neck. Without trying to restore his crumbling body, Imina avoided it just by bending his knees and twisting his body. Furthermore, utilizing the power from his upper body that he twisted back, he made an irregular counterattack, diagonally below, with an orbit that looked like it made a circle.

In that time, Ji Dig had taken a small leap backwards. Imina, whose body rotated, attacked low like a beast; his body crawling on all fours, as if he was lying face down. One blow aimed at the feet. It was stopped by a wooden sword.

“HAH!”

Not minding the details, he gradually raised his posture while showering random attacks. It looked frantic, but in fact, the orbits were refined. Subjecting only Ji Dig, he did not allow any counterattacks.

While hitting again and again with his sword, Imina shouted.

“Milifica!”

To his comrades, which were watching over the situation, holding their breaths.

“Take everyone with you, out of the forest!”

Milifica showed a bewildered, and later a hesitating, expression.

“Imina... But, we’re.”

“Don’t mind me! This guy’s an enemy for me and Ellis... we’ll do it!”

Ellis also thought that was what they were to do.

With Dierich’s death, the evocation where they were losing their way had already been removed. And, now when Imina was distracting Ji Dig, it was good opportunity for withdrawal.

“Hey, boy, don’t say those selfish things.”

Ziadrene said, with a mixture of reprimand and indignation in his voice.

Yet, restraining the volume of his voice so that he wouldn’t disturb Imina’s concentration,

“But it seems like he ain’t sweet enough to accompany you alone.”

“You’re wrong... That’s not it!”

Instead of him, who was frantically continuing to wield his sword, Ellis answered. Ji Dig was not “not sweet enough to accompany Imina and Ellis alone”.

“It’s getting even worse... At this rate, everyone will be done in!”

He was “not sweet enough to accompany everyone in the Order of Chivalry”-.

“A good choice, Ellis.”

While brushing away Imina’s sword again and again, Ji Dig laughed.

“But, have I taught you about my ‘Common Technique’?”

He had neither taught, not shown her.

Since Ji Dig had known Ellis since the time she was born, he was naturally familiar with her common technique. However, that was not so for Ellis. It was a difference if they were parent and child or grandparent and grandchild, but the connection of being uncle and niece was not one to freely teach their own unique evocations. Therefore, the details were unknown to her.

However, she had heard about it, if only by hearsay.

Ji Dig Endveil’s unique evocation – his common technique, was suitable for taking on many people with only one person. He had power that would be enough to face troops with only one person and triumph.

“Everyone, please go!”

More than not knowing what kind of evocation it was, she couldn’t explain. That was frustrating.

However, she had not chance but to have it granted unto her.

Therefore, she raised her voice,

“I beg you, leave this to us!”

Glancing at the screaming Ellis as if pitying her, Ji Dig coldly spoke.

“...Unfortunately, it’s too late.”

Stopping the blow with his sword that he swung ten-odd times from right in front, he shouted. Imina’s body flew in the air, and was hurled a full five metres backward.

That extraordinary strength was because of inorganic necromancy. Yes – at that time, Ji Dig had finally applied a body-strengthening evocation to himself.

Why had he been crossing swords without applying body-strengthening to himself until then?

It was not because he despised Imina. It was not that there hadn't been any time for him to use it.

It was because he had been focusing on another evocation, that his hands hadn't been active to that point.

When Ellis had realized it, it was already too late.

"So, this is the first time that I show it to you... I wish I never would have an opportunity to do so, were it possible. Anyhow, it's an useless power, only useful in the battlefield."

He slowly lowered his sword, speaking words of repentance.

He closed his eyes while restraining Imina with his presence alone.

And so, Ji Dig Endveil took a deep breath.

He calmly took the words which served as the "Common Name" to his "Common Technique" in his mouth.

"...'Army Crusher'"

That moment – Ellis' entire body was assailed by a feeling which seemed to grate her down like thunder.

"...ah!?"

Imina seemed to not feel anything at all. The same for Milifica, Sashtal, and Ziadrene. In other words, it was not that Ji Dig had unleashed his thirst for blood and sword energy.

The one who was able to perceive it was Ellis, and then yet another,

"What, the hell... Is this?"

Only Fiene, who similarly was an Elf.

The reason for that was because it was spirit energy.

Along with the spirit energy from the surroundings which created a storm-like tempest, there was an impact which ran through her back.

It closely resembled when one had been subjected to an extreme variation in atmospheric pressure, or the buzzing in one's ears when diving in water. In other words, that kind of things. The spirit energy from the ground suddenly flowed somewhere, in a large quantity.

The destination could be unknown even to Fiene, who was particularly good at perceiving spirit energy. Thinking that, she swiftly looked at her. Her line of sight was toward another place, toward the depths of the forest. However, as soon as she started to swimmingly move her eyes here and there – the colours of astonishment and terror came to be in her eyes.

Fiene muttered, in a daze.

“It’s not, a... lie.”

A few seconds after that, Ellis too understood what had happened within the depths of the forest in front of her eyes.

The demons. A dozen or so Ogres, Orcs, and Goblins slowly drew near.

However, they weren’t just demons. If they were a simple group of demons, they would be opponents that had been defeated however many, dozens of times until then. Fiene did not have that expression.

They were corpses.

Some demons had their arms ripped off, and some demons had their bodies sliced into two. Some demons lacked necks, and some demons dragged along their own entrails. Some demons lacked a foot, and some demons had lost their entire lower body but still dragged themselves forward with their arms.

They were living corpses, which had died yet been forced to move through an evocation.

In other words, that was,

“Have a good look, and tremble. At my evocation, ‘Army Crusher’”

Ji Dig’s Unique Evocation. Was it the “Common Evocation” that was bestowed with a “Common Name”?

“It’s a joke... It’s fucking bullshit.”

Fiene grumbled, with a faint smile on her face. While it was like she was joking, her tone of voice was startled.

Ellis too had the same feeling. That it was bullshit.

In order to operate organisms other than oneself using organic necromancy, one would need to borrow spirit energy from the Spirit Veins in the earth in order to supply the necessary spiritual power for manipulation, after connecting the spirit paths of the target with oneself. However, connecting to more than two places and maintaining the spirit paths meant preposterous hardship. It was impossible for Dierich, who had fought earlier on. Therefore, there was a chance to take advantage of that misconception, and he would be able to defeat them.

While the appearance of Ji Dig’s “Army Crusher” was similar to Dierich, it couldn’t be compared with it.

There were dozens of demon corpses, and manipulating them while at the same time connecting their spirit paths and infusing them with spirit energy – let alone doing it separately with both hands, it would be described like writing different sentences with each of one’s ten fingers.

That was the reason why he didn’t strengthen his body while crossing swords with Imina. If he were to do that many simultaneous connections in the background, he would not be able to send the evocation around to his own body.

Ellis and Fiene’s bodies shuddered and stiffened in fear. And all the thoughtful people saw the appearances of the two, came to notice that it wasn’t just a simple matter, and were cautious.

Therefore, the first one who moved was a person who was unable to judge the situation.

“Don’t you fucking call for those creepy fucking things!”

One of Ziadrene's followers shouted and stabbed the corpse of an Orc.

Or perhaps, he thought that the Order of Chivalry was overawed, and thought that he could work them up if he couldn't raise their fighting spirits. However, that was shallow thinking.

“I'll fucking go and fuck it up!”

He struck his club – his magic wand, clad in a wave of heat, on the head of the corpse of a demon.

The evocation that emitted the heat wave was, even among the flame system, an evocation specialized to cause trauma. Unlike the flames which had the main purpose to remove people's field of vision or to obstruct their breathing, it would inflame skin with only the heat itself. Therefore, if it were a normal demon, it would probably recoil from sharp pain, at the very least.

However, those were corpse-demons.

It was something that would be known only to Ellis and the others, who could sense the flow of spirit energy, but the demons' biological activities had already ceased. In other words, they were moving in a dead state. Ji Dig did not resuscitate the dead, but manipulated their corpses just as they were.

What was meant with that they weren't alive?

They did not breathe. They would continue to move as long as their source of power, the spirit energy, was supplied to them. And, no matter how much their bodies were wounded, they would not flinch from pain, or anything.

“Stop it... Step back, Leivis!”

Fiene's act of constraint was but one second too slow.

Even if Ziadrene's henchman – Leivis – had shot a heat wave that burned the Orc's head.

Even if its nose, resembling a wild boar's, was blistered, its eyes inflamed, even if its eyeballs were boiling.

For the corpse-demons, they were bagatelles; nothing more than external stimuli.

The Orc responded, roughly mowing him down with its left arm.

Skin, organs, and flesh made a sound as if they were broken, smashed to pieces, and crushed, all at the same time.

It wasn't only from the side that had received the attack, but also from the attacking side; even as the Orc's arm twisted, it was a blow that didn't change.

Leivis danced in mid-air as if he was a piece of paper that had been blown on.

His body was furiously beaten by a nearby tree. A short while later, he feebly slipped down the trunk. Traces of blood, which clung to the trunk, stained it. No matter how one would look at it, it was an instant death.

Only Leivis' club was left behind in the Orc's head. Even if it had gotten stuck in its head, the spikes sticking out, it did not have the feelings to care.

And, the opening drama had not ended with only that.

"It's a li..."

Someone muttered just a few words. As if it were nonsense. As if it were a nightmare.

It wasn't as if they were trembling from the Ogre's strangeness.

It was a murmur while they were gazing at their comrade's – Leivis' – corpse.

"He..."

That Leivis, who had just only been killed, with a squinch.

As if he had been pulled from above with a silk reeling, as if he had a spring inside him,

"...What joke's, that?"

He stood up.

Slumping, his neck turned away. His arm, on the side that had been mowed down by

the Orc, twisted.

To all appearances, he was a corpse. Nevertheless, Leivis stood up.

Standing up – slowly joining the corpse-demons, he joined the circle that besieged the Order of Chivalry.

“So that’s what it is.”

Ziadrene, disgustedly, scoffed.

Mending his posture with his big hatchet, he took a deep breath with the sound of cutting through cloth.

“Don’t you fucking fuck with me. It’s beyond a fucking joke, this is.”

“Army Crusher” – surely, that was the “Army Crusher”.

It was the most terrible evocation, which could destroy military troops with one single man.

“Ellis!!”

It was Imina who called back Ellis, who dumbfounded overlooked the situation’s, consciousness.

Taken aback, she stared at Imina.

Their gazes meeting, she mutely nodded. With just that, she immediately understood the words that he wanted to say, what he wanted her to do. Yes – surely, she had no chance but to do it.

In other words, the unleashing of “Exellis” through the Crimson-Stained Water Lily.

Originally, that would be their trump card. Besides it shaving away Ellis’ life, it also imposed an enormous burden on Imina’s body. Therefore, what would be desirable would be to do their best at first, and only use it when it was unbearable, no matter what. As they had decided that it was to be a secret power, they wouldn’t want to show it to Ziadrene and the others if it were possible. A while ago, that had happened, and they said to the others that they were to escape ahead of them.

However, the the situation no longer accommodated for that to be taken into consideration.

They were dead soldiers which didn't feel pain and were unable to kill even one tried to, which probably would continue to move forever if one didn't render them lumps of meat. In addition, if an ally were to be killed, they would become the enemy's numbers just like that.

There was but one way to stop them. It was to bring down Ji Dig. And if that downbringing were to be delayed, the victims would multiply just like that. That being the case, that wasn't the time for hesitation.

Returning the nod, Ellis began to run toward Imina.

Imina held his sword as to pierce Ellis' body with its crimson blade.

And-.

His eyes suddenly opened wide.

His eyes were tinged in surprise. Following, uneasiness started to peek through.

It was at the same time that Ellis wondered what she was to do.

“Eh...”

Something chilly, the feeling of a horrible sensation fell upon her back.

Even though she should have started running, her feet didn't move – nor her entire body. Her arms were forcibly moved toward her both sides. They were bound behind her back by someone in the background.

She felt a profound spirit energy. However, it was not the presence of someone alive. It was a power so overwhelming that she would be unable to shake free from it even if a body strengthening evocation were to be applied on her body.

However, rather than dealing with her movements, it was simply strong. She could not hear its breaths. However, what stank was the reek of blood that almost was vomit-inducing.

There was nothing acting as an obstacle behind her head, in other words,

“Dierich’s...!?”

Through “Army Crusher”, Ji Dig was manipulating Dierich’s corpse and binding Ellis.

“Ellis!”

Imina, who just was about to rush over to her, his eyes completely stained with the colour of impatience.

The enemy would not allow that.

“Kuh...!”

He stood in front of Imina – as if to make sure to divide the two.

“Be that as is may that you committed the foolish act of running away, you are my important niece. I can’t afford to give that to you.”

Had he inferred, through his warrior’s intuition, that Ellis and the others were going to make a mess? Or was it, purely what he had said, that he had to punish her as her uncle for doing whatever she pleased?

Either way, it was exceedingly problematic.

Seeing the disadvantages of the situation, Milifica cried together with him.

“All hands, deploy in groups of three people, and take distance from the enemies!”

She was calm to the end. At least, it seemed so from her commanding tone of voice and her resolute attitude. Wouldn’t be the fruits of the labours of her having lead a company to fight many times as the commander?

“Sashtal and Fream, escort Raimi. Without minding the enemy, Raimi, pick out an invocation that seems to be useful from your grimoires. Fiene, if you have any amazing ideas, please propose them now. Ziadrene, I entrust the battle command of your group members to you. Afterwards, while barely scraping through, we will attempt to rescue Ellis. The priorities should, first of all, be to not die, and the second to rescue Ellis. The last priority is the monsters, please devote yourselves to nonaggressive defence. It is

forbidden to recklessly try to bring one down!"

The instructions that she began with were accurate, and her reactions were the very best.

Milifica knew about "Exellis". Confident that the state of affairs could be defeated if Ellis could come into contact with Imina, she moved her comrades for that purpose only.

She ground her teeth in frustration and miserableness.

Imina immediately made a decision and tried to move.

Milifica is conducting herself so bravely. Yet, what the hell am I doing?

By just helplessly getting caught, I have worsened the situation-.

Encased in self-hatred, she put his entire body's strength in twisting around. While doing that, she desperately thought.

Even if I use an evocation that strengthens my body, I would show no chances of shaking free from it. Then, if I could manipulate the surrounding trees, wouldn't I be able to do something? No, I'm bad at evocations which manipulate organisms. Simply put, it doesn't seem likely that I can gain power from the vegetation enough to be able to break the deadlock of this situation.

That's right, maybe we could use the "Crimson-Stained Water Lily" to consume the spirit energy that flows to Dierich's corpse. In that case, if I somehow got into contact with blood – my own blood, or.

"I don't think you can slip out."

Ji Dig's appearance from behind, sensing Ellis' struggling presence, mercilessly announced.

"Shouldn't you know that even since you were very young? You are third-rate as a user of organic necromancy. Your skills in both body strengthening and the manipulation of organisms are both worse than average. You're facing this kind of fighting scene in the first place. Your sole forte is "Crimson-Stained Water Lily", but... did you think that I wouldn't take any countermeasures?"

Together with his words, the grass under her feet grew into vines, rustling.

Manipulating the vegetation while using a “Common Technique”.

While the grass wriggled as if it were tentacles and grew thick enough to be rope, it bound Ellis’ both wrists. Furthermore, her arms were pinioned, and she was further secured so that she couldn’t move her elbows.

Next, the vine which crawled up from the body, entwined from her chin to her mouth. As she was forced to open her mouth, it twined around it and became a gag.

Even her five fingers couldn’t feel anything. She wasn’t even allowed to bite her tongue.

No matter how much she twisted around, that wouldn’t be enough to harm herself, and so therefore, shedding blood – to use her Common Technique, was impossible.

“uh... Gu, mu!”

She even tried to shake her head as if to resist, but even that wish didn’t come true. Tears ran in Ellis’ eyes. She, who was incapable of doing anything, was unbearably frustrated.



While glancing at Ellis, who was bound in such a way that she was unable to endure it, from his edge of sight, Imina grew impatient.

I was one move too late.

That regret tormented his chest.

When he originally had been crossing swords with him, it was obvious that the bastard’s body wasn’t in the state where he was using a body-strengthening evocation. If they only had set “Exellis” free at that time, they could have won without doing anything more. Assuming that he probably only was looking down at them, the result of that was that Imina attacked him normally.

Of course, it was only a what-if story of regret.

Because the enemy wasn’t an idiot, it would be obvious for him to change his

responses according to their situation. If Imina were to improve his physical strength by using “Crimson-Stained Water Lily” earlier, he would have halted the Common Technique that he was proceeding with in the background and opposed him using a body-strengthening evocation too.

In the first place, it was powerful, but the time limit was short. That Ellis was wearing out from the intense power was evident to even a bystander. In that case, it would do if they were to see it and withdraw at once, waiting for the effect to wear off while continuing their work.

In other words – however much Imina and the others took measures as best as they could, wouldn’t Ji Dig definitely surpass them? That was the unavoidable result, and for that reason it was an unbearable disgrace.

“Hrm... Certainly, that looks pretty good, for a human.”

Easily evading Imina’s sideway sweep, Ji Dig barked.

“Especially the speed is worthy of admiration. It’s dangerous even if it is worse than the evocations which originate from us Elves.”

He felt wrath in his heart; “Don’t be an idiot!”

Of course. Since four years ago, that day when he had lost his arms and legs to Shirjis – because even if he were living, what was within that blade was desperation which had been forged again and again; him not wanting to lose.

Of course, there were limits to his physical abilities and reaction speed.

Therefore, he had learned a sword art to make up for that, in order to kill. It was a technique that somewhat deviated from what was called fencing and was different from the norm, an unorthodox school that didn’t have forms. It was something where one accumulated wisdom only in order to win over the enemy, and only pursued skill to kill the enemy. It was a school where one only investigated how to pierce the enemy’s gaps, to read their blind spots, to weave one’s way through breathing, and to expose the enemy’s attacks without getting attacked oneself.

The person who was his teacher was severe and unforgiving. Four years, since he had reached the point that his work had permeated into his very body, making him able to move without thinking. There hadn’t been a day where he wasn’t close to death. His

heart had literally even stopped many times over. Was it possible that that very accumulation – the result of his persistence, was lost so easily?

He evaded, predicting the swift mystical sword which was slashed diagonally at him, from only its prior motion. Flinging up soil from under his feet, he restrained the enemy's field of vision while going round and cutting into his blind spot. The opponent's field of view should have been narrowed down to one eye.

Aiming at his throat, he thrust his sword straight ahead.

"Cheeky bastard!"

With a short cry, the point of his sword flew through the air. His outlandish physical strength, caused by his inorganic necromancy, had transited from a defensive movement in a resting state to its maximum speed in an instant, surpassing the limit that could be coped with.

Ji Dig leapt backwards, out of range. And, kicking the ground with his feet in that way, he once again drew near and attacked, with one step. Imina, who just had attacked, could not avoid it.

But – there was no need to evade it.

Even for the opposite side, it was a hasty counterattack. As far as Imina could see, Ji Dig wasn't in a posture as to unleash a fatal stroke from his direction. Therefore the trajectory of his sword would be limited. If it were restricted, it would be possible for him to anticipate it. If he could anticipate it, he could do the safe thing, using his sword in orbit.

With a brraink.

The wooden mystical sword, cut from trees while having the sharpness to even cut through iron, and the gem-like, deeply translucent crimson one-handed sword that was in fact not even made of mineral, crashed together with a strange sound.

The impact was fierce.

Imina's arms sprung up with his sword.

Of course, that was a gap.

The opponent was sure to take another step in order to pursue him. His reaction was slightly slow. Therefore, he had predicted before he could see it, that he could conversely set the opponent aside by using the force of the jump.

Taking a defensive posture as one elbow crossed over his back, he somersaulted, increasing the distance. Just as expected, the enemy's sword flew through the air – just as he had predicted.

“I'll correct myself, boy.”

Ji Dig spoke to Imina, who confronted him, standing up after he had increased the distance.

“Saying that it's 'pretty good' is out of the question. It's unfortunate that you were left as a human.”

“Is your intention to praise me? But, that's an insult to me.”

He glared with an intent to kill – in truth, it was a bluff.

It probably was too blatant for his opponent.

“I'm sorry to say that I'm not praising you. It's the opposite... It's regrettable. If you were to be born an Elf, you would surely find a good match.”

His eyes, that looked at Imina, held a deeper colour of pity than respect.

“...Kuh.”

He unconsciously ground his teeth.

What that bastard had said, was completely correct.

“Perhaps, your skill allows for a fifty-fifty chance against me in my base state, yeah. Of course, even that is worthy of admiration. People who can fight me as equals are numbered, even in the Elven Village.”

In other words, it appeared as if Imina's sword art had reached the same level as those people who had continued to train until their prime of life. It was certain that it was “a thing that was worthy of admiration”.

-If it were to that extent.

"However, in this state where I have performed an evocation, it would be two parts to eight at the most. No... One part to nine parts. I'm just crossing swords and making up the numbers, but I guess you would understand if you have that degree of skill?"

He understood. While he didn't want to admit it, he knew it.

He had managed to somehow evade the attack. His appearance was also as if he could counterattack.

However, that was all. And in order to accomplish that much, he had to strain his body and focus with complete devotion so much that there was no time to even blink.

And if he were to continue fighting, his stamina would decrease some time, and his concentration wear away. In other words, if the enemy were to wait for Imina to grow fatigued, it would be nothing but a battle where the win would fall into their lap.

"There is no factor in me winning over you. That is the innate difference which stretches between Elves and humans."

Ji Dig's words interminably got on Imina's nerves.

"If my evocation is limited to strengthening my own body, it's second-rate in the Elven Tribe. However, just by adding that second-rate technique, the likelihood of your sword reaching my body is impossibly low."

Even after those four years had passed, was it still not enough?

The countless occasions where he had been close to death had accumulated, yet he couldn't reach him?

Or was the reason for why he unable to compare with him just because he was born that way-?

"...Shut up."

However, yet.

"That's unrelated. Those things mean nothing to me."

Imina had no choice of giving up, or anything of the sort.

Did that mean to give up on the past – that tragedy where everyone in the village of Salaid, his mother, and his sister, had died?

Did that mean to give up on what was happening now – on the imprisoned Ellis, and the matter of Milifica and the others?

Did that mean to give up on the future – on meeting Shirjis again, and piercing his sword into that bastard's heart?

Don't you fucking kid me. I would rather die than give up on that.

No – if I were to give up so much that I died, I wouldn't be able to live now.

“Be it two parts or one part, I will go and collect my victory. By taking your head. If I don't do that... I don't have any reason to live!”

Imina charged with a roar.

He crawled in a low posture as to shorten the distance, and slashed with a sideways sweep.

“Indeed, I understand. In that case, I will, at least, accept your resolution as a soldier.”

Ji Dig answered Imina, sighing.



Ziadrene formed a circle with Milifica and Fiene, and dealt with the corpse-demons.

Frankly, the progress of the battle was unfavourable.

Even though the enemy was slow, they were so resilient that they were fearsome. To the degree as if to say that bringing them down would be impossible. In that sense, it could be said that Milifica's order was correct. Holding the wish that one were to bring down the corpses that would not stop moving unless they were rendered into small pieces of flesh while in front of them would be foolish.

While restraining them with magical swords and taking the distance, they drew them

in as they approached, approaching them as they were drawn in. Other people, not only them, also took strategies that were roughly similar.

In Ziadrene's opinion, the ones which had a possibility of breaking the current deadlock were those two, Fiene and Raimi. However, that pair seemed to have hopelessly small chances.

Fiene was attempting to dispel the control of the corpse from a moment ago. She was trying to do the same thing as in the previous battle, to snatch away away the vegetation manipulator's leadership. However, it seemed that there was a remarkable difference in the rank of evocation used by Ji Dig and that Elf. The face of the girl who was closing her eyes in concentration next to him was full of anguish, suggesting that that achievement would be endlessly difficult.

Raimi was about ten metres away, frantically turning the pages of her grimoire while defended by Sashtal and Fream. If one were to only judge from her appearance, it seemed that she was working hard. However, she was intrinsically a girl who could immediately track down an evocation most suitable for the state of the battle from her thick grimoires. That took time – in other words, it meant that the optimum evocation wasn't in the grimoire.

Well, if it was a load too heavy for both Fiene and Raimi, what were they to do?

“Oi, little girl.”

Ziadrene asked from Milifica, who was preparing the Order of Chivalry to restrain the corpse-demons.

While her instructions generally were precise, there was but one thing whose intention was unreadable.

“What is it?”

That was,

“If we help that young girl, Ellis, will it work out?”

It was about the priority of their actions.

He understood the first thing, which was to not die. That was something very typical

for that sweet little princess. However, why was the second priority that they were supposed to do “Ellis’ rescue”?

He thought that she had expressed the feeling that she wanted to help her imprisoned comrade, but that seemed to be incorrect.

In the first place, that they were to “Not die”, wasn’t an order for all intents and purposes, but rather something resembling an encouraging salute. In that case, why was “Rescuing Ellis” the top priority of the concrete orders?

If he were to think back on that while doubting that there was a reason for prioritizing that, Milifica’s face was seemingly convinced as if – as long as Ellis was recued, the state of affairs could be defeated.

Milifica answered Ziadrene’s question after a few moments.

“It will.”

“In what way?”

“Concretely, it’s Imina and Ellis. If those two fight together, we will probably win over the enemy.”

–I see.

The relationship between Imina and Ellis closely resembled the one between Ziadrene and Fiene. In other words, it was a team between a human and an Elf. The cooperation between inorganic necromancy and organic necromancy – there surely was a way of fighting that only they could perform. Just like him.

“I do want to rescue Ellis in some way or another, but... there is currently no weak spot in that Elf. While fighting with Imina, he is also wary of our situation. If we go to rescue her, we would be killed immediately.”

It was just as Milifica had said.

That guy named Ji Dig was unthinkably skilled. Of course, that troublesome evocation, but also through his sword art, one would have no choice but admiring it. Imina, who was crossing swords with him, was already a miracle.

But – just because they weren't able to pierce through that weak spot and interfere, things wouldn't get better even if they only awaited a chance like that. More than all, miracles could not continue forever.

In other words, Imina would be killed.

Ziadrene sighed deeply.

"Dearie me", he thought. "It can't be helped, we have no choice but to do it."

Truly, dragging someone into such a fucked up situation, even if it could lead to something unpredictable.

He tapped the shoulder of the woman who frantically controlled the spirit energy, her eyes closed.

"Fiene, it's all OK. That's a waste, stop it."

She had been in a lengthy relationship with him. They had, ever since they days when they were bandits, shared their pleasure and pain, life and death. She was the one and only woman in the world who loved that idiot, who was similar to herself.

"But, sweetheart..."

"More than that, and I'll punch ya. Come with me."

What a nice woman – even if a time came where I were to plunge into near-certain death, she would not let me go.

Fiene opened her eyes at those words from Ziadrene.

She understood everything. And after understanding, she, looking blank, laughed and nodded.

"Okay."

"Ziadrene, Fiene? What are you..."

"It might be bad, but we're taking independent action. Princess, you go meet up with Sashtal and the lads."

What they were taking on were corpse-demons, two of them.

"I can't see which one they're going to chase, but... luckily, their movements are dull. Well, I guess it doesn't matter. They have to remember that even if they do win, that those are weaker than living demons."

"Please wait, so what..."

"Don't worry about that, just be quiet and do as you're told, little girl."

Ziadrene bluntly denied Milifica, who refused to back down

Not as a member of the "Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves" – as Ziadrene Meindreigh.

"I understand that you are desperately doing stuff as the Commander. Because I too am a boss, though imperfect. However, leave it to the adults once in a while. It shouldn't be too bad."

"..., I understand, Ziadrene. Your independent action is approved."

Milifica showed a hesitant expression on her face, but nodded a little while after.

"Only, please don't at least forget about the maximum priority order... Do not die, absolutely don't."

And because she still didn't drop the pretention of being the Commander, she was a great jewel. Her "Do not die" didn't seem to be something akin to inspiration or encouragement, but a serious order.

"Aye, roger that."

She understood. Just because they were approaching near-certain death, it didn't mean that they intended to die without doing anything.

Readyng his big hatchet, he turned his eyes toward somewhere else than the corpse-demons – in other words, toward Ji Dig.

"Fiene. Are you prepared?"

“You too... you fine? That guy is an ever larger nuisance than last time.”

She was talking about two years ago, when the entire gang had been caught in a trap and arrested.

“Because, at that time, I had the leeway to set you free. Now I don’t.”

At that time, the war with the Elves had already started. Therefore, only Fiene couldn’t be allowed to be caught. Still, the gang had pursued her after eventually hearing the rumour that she was taken to the Great Fortress – however, she had hid her ears, pretended to be a human, and undertaken a long journey alone.

Fiene laughed.

“I’m glad. Because unlike two years ago, I’m necessary now?”

Therefore, Ziadrene laughed too.

“Yes, that’s how it is. I need you, so come.”

“I guess it can’t be helped. I’ll go along with you.”

While he sounded like he was speaking in an involuntary manner like it was forced upon them, it was but a pretence. She was someone who knew Ziadrene well. In truth, Fiene too was dying to go out and help Ellis.

It was no wonder. Because they were of the same race, and moreover because they were in situations that resembled one another. A woman who cast away her country even though she was an Elf, fought a war against the Elves even though she was an Elf herself, and who loved a human even though she was an Elf – there was no way she could leave that young girl, whose circumstances until then were so close to hers, alone.

Although, she couldn’t say that it was the same for her.

Ziadrene, sank his body down,

“OOOOOOOH!”

He attacked with a war cry.

He could not move so fast so that it would become a surprise attack. Even if he crept up, he would be noticed from his presence. That being the case, the very best would be to yell in order to attract his attention, and go after him from the front. Imina, who had noticed Ziadrene, shouted with a frustrated expression.

“Don’t you come! Not me...”

As if he meant to for him to help Ellis. Was that perhaps what he wanted to say?

“I can’t hear youu, lad!”

Laughing heartily, he brushed aside Imina’s petition.

“Not there... I can’t settle down, goddammit!”

He swung down “Serpent Smasher” toward Ji Dig, who had turned his back to him.

The opponent didn’t even look at him.

While twisting his body to evade Imina’s thrusts, he caught the big hatchet with his wooden sword that he carelessly held.

“So a reinforcement that couldn’t bear it came, did he? However... Do you think it has any meaning?”

The blow, which Ziadrene had released from his imposing frame with all his might, was handled as if it were a child’s blow.

The difference in power was truly unfair.

“Hah... What indeed!”

However, he had also understood that.

And – just because he knew that, didn’t mean that he would step back.

“RRAAAAWR!”

He struck twice, thrice, one strike after another. He had the confidence that he could break a large tree. He had the confidence that he could drill through, if it even were a

rock. However, the opponent only held out his wooden sword in the orbit of the big hatchet.

“Foolish. Die.”

Together with the fourth strike, Ji Dig scythed down his sword, over his back.

It came at a time where he was unable to avoid it. In the first place, he wasn’t even able to react very much to the speed. The blade of spirit energy, flowing in the wooden sword, bisected Ziadrene’s body, and scattered his entrails in the forest – is what should have happened.

“Wha...?”

Ji Dig opened his single eye.

His wooden sword had stopped at the skin.

He had simply thumped Ziadrene’s abdomen hard, the blade not tearing through his flesh.

“Ha, I’m embarrassed that I was made light of.”

Fiene, who was behind Ziadrene, daringly smiled.

“I too am a but a scrap of the Elven Tribe. I guess I can do it if it’s just something like this.”

The logic was simple.

Manipulating the spirit energy that drifted in the wind, she had created a thin, invisible wall on Ziadrene’s body surface.

A mystical sword was a sword which was created through the user’s blade, clad in spirit energy. That being the case, if one just didn’t touch the blade with spirit energy, one would, at least, not die.

Spirit energy could become a shield which stopped spirit energy – even if it drifted in the air.

It was a technique with the same logic as the one which had been up for the past seven days at the base, the barrier which had isolated it from the spirit energy. Rather, speaking of the purpose, that was the technique which originally would have a practical use in battle.

Of course, stopping the spirit energy which the wooden sword used would split off the very most power – but, as a user of organic necromancy, Fiene was far and away the worse one. The likelihood of it failing was high – similar to the interference with the corpse-demons. As such, it would be more certain with the spirit energy which drifted in the air.

Anyhow, that way would be better if they wanted to avoid fatal wounds at the very least.

“Guh... uh, ka, ha!”

The blood, which spilled from Ziadrene’s stomach, moistened his mouth.

Even if he wasn’t killed, he had been knocked around quite a bit.

More than not being able to interfere with the spirit energy that followed Ji Dig’s wooden sword through his organic necromancy, there had been no change in the reality that he had been fiercely struck with a dreadfully hard wooden sword. There was the sound of bones breaking. It was certain that several organs of his had been damaged.

But, if his torso wasn’t cut in half, he could still move.

“Ha, it hurts. It hurts... but that’s it!”

He once again swung his big hatchet underfoot, while crouching this time. He used an evocation while wielding it. The deadly poison, which the big hatched had been clad in, propagated to the point where the blade had been thrown; in other words, the ground.

What rolled up from there, was lumps of earth which contained toxins.

“Gu, nuh!?”

Ji Dig flinched back without picking them up. Whatever way he strengthened his body, it didn’t mean that he had raised his resistance to poison. It was also possible that it would be more effective as his metabolism increased.

“RAAH!”

Taking advantage of that gap, Ziadrene began hurling himself at Ji Dig.

Opening both his arms wide, as if to hug him – he touched him. Grasping him, he held him down.

“Boy!”

Him too getting done in by the cloud of poison, his field of vision blurred. Ziadrene loudly cried out to Imina, who was sure to be behind him – toward Imina Haimatie.

“What the fuck are you doing? I’m fucking struggling in the face of death!”

While he screamed that – he remembered.



It was something from a long time ago.

Was that from twenty years ago, no, more? It was when it was doubtful whether Ziadrene was an adult or not, when he just had stained his body with the profession of the thief. He had not met Fiene yet, either.

The imperial capital, and its surroundings, had fallen into ruin.

It was the era when the war with the Southern Savage Tribes was intense. Conscription was popular and the taxes were severe, when the disparity of wealth was just growing wider. While there on the one hand were people who lead lives lacking even the bread for tomorrow, the damn nobles where in a state where they were absorbed in having elegant balls every day.

Ziadrene, who couldn’t bear that absurdity, stealing everything he could get his hands on from the rich people, killed, killed, and snatched things away, clearing away the melancholy of the society.

His physical strength suited the occasion. He held a thoughtfulness which didn’t suit his body. He also moved cunningly. However, they still were things that had turned up as misfortune, not matter what.

While they were running from the subjugation party, they had digressed from their comrades, and had been surrounded to make matters worse.

Even if they weren't many, there were enough enemies for it not to be possible to rival them alone. To make matters even more worse, they were at a place far away from their refuge, along a remote main road, making the chances that anyone else would help, or something, very slim.

Indeed, he was prepared to die. At that time, he was still but a medium-level bandit himself. He was not important enough to be wished for to be captured, but rather to be beheaded on the spot.

The ones which had organized that subjugation force was a certain private Order of Chivalry, lead by the nobles.

In other words, it seemed that the bastards which Ziadrene frequently had targeted had sent them in though their personal grudges. Be it their just deserts, they were bandits for the very reason that they hated the nobles. Rather than being killed by them, he would rather stab his own throat.

It was when he was thinking about those kinds of things – they suddenly passed along the main road.

A young man with the air of a soldier, carrying a woman on the back of his saddle while straddling a horse.

He made a grimace as if to say “darn it!”.

It seemed that he had come across another person. The main road was winding, and the visibility bad, so it should have been an unexpected chance meeting.

As if to conceal the woman which was riding behind him, he pulled the horse's body. However, that backfired. The horse stumbled a little forwards, and the hood of the overcoat which the woman wore started to shake.

Someone, with a sharp look on their face, cried.

“That woman, isn't she Lilitia!?”

It appeared that she was a young woman of the higher-ups. Everyone started to

murmur.

“Lilitia? You don’t say, Yusala’s?”

“It it’s the illegitimate child of a commoner... yeah.”

“Ah, I see. Hey, you, don’t move, stop!”

“You a soldier? Or a civilian? Whatever you are, hand that woman over to us.”

“He’s good. We’ve found a trophy greater than some thieves, or something like that!”

Everyone suddenly grew lively. No-one was watching him anymore. It seemed that women were treated similar to fugitives within the soldiers.

It seemed that they no longer looked at him and the likes, who were worthless thieves.

Ziadrene, who had his back turned on, committed that fury to memory. He couldn’t forgive it. Am I, to those bastards, only worth that much? Therefore, he had no choice but to take that opportunity to escape.

To thrust his dagger, which he held in his hand, into the back of the soldier which was nearby.

“Gu, ah?”

“O... oi, there’s bandits, behind you!”

“They’re slow, these dense bastards are!”

The command was completely disarrayed through that one blow. If they weren’t even surrounded by the group but only by those people there, they would systematically strike down each and every soldier, kick them flying, and cut them up.

“Shit, it can’t be helped... Lill, wait!”

The man, leaving the horse behind, jumped off from his riding position.

Drawing his sword, he held it ready to use. The blade was, as a matter of course, directed at the subjugation force. He hesitated for a moment. After gazing as if

preparing himself for the worst, he moved as to cut them down in succession, with brilliant skill.

Before long, after a few minutes.

Every soldier on the subjugation force had been massacred, and the only ones which remained at that place was Ziadrene and the man – and, the woman named Lilitia; the three of them.

He apologetically smiled at Ziadrene, who stood stock still, breathing roughly.

“I’m so sorry, I was swallowed up. However, it seems that we were similar in that regard.”

After that, they briefly spoke about their circumstances as if they were replacements for an apology.

The man said that he was a soldier belonging to the Imperial Army, the Royal Army Corps. The one who was riding together with him on the horse was a woman of a particular social position.

While she had been living as a commoner, she had been dragged into a power struggle that she didn’t expect, and had been on the verge of being murdered. Rescuing that girl, and escorting her to somewhere far away, to a place where the adversaries couldn’t keep an eye on her, was the duty bestowed on him.

It had become such a matter where it was the very moment when they had departed to his home town, a border village, which seemed to be the very best to shelter her.

He said that he had to fight them because there were people within them which knew of her origin.

The man added, as if to console him. You shouldn’t mind, in any case, that force was under the influence of those which attempted to murder her.

Therefore, I would rather like to thank you for helping me–.

If he were to speak frankly, Ziadrene had no interest at all in heaving the story of the origin of neither the man, and certainly not of the woman either.

In the first place, a power struggle between fellow nobles was trivial. It was not

anything he knew about. He had a feeling that it was good that they were crushed of their own accord, as much as possible.

Only-.

That soldier, who was born and raised in a border village, had such naïve eyes. He was simply chattering on, saying that he had been dragged into it, to him, a bandit.

As for the woman too, it was as if she was a village girl more than a noble. Even if she was beautiful, it wasn't that she was refined, and there was not a single part of her which assumed an air of importance.

Therefore, he didn't think that he was going to take money or goods from them.

And either way, it was certain that Ziadrene had walked from there with his life.

It was a situation where he likely would have been killed if that man hadn't passed along.

The man once again mounted his horse, and spoke with a nod.

"I can't stay at ease. We are leaving before long... I would appreciate if you would be able to keep quiet about this if you can. Particularly to that lot of nobles under the command of Shukua."

I don't know about those factions, and I am in the first place a fugitive.

As he sniffed his nose in response, as they just was about to get off the main road and enter the mountains, the woman brusquely asked.

"You, aren't you all worn out. You've been running for a long time trying to escape, haven't ya?"

There anything wrong with that?

As he glared at her, she didn't flinch even slightly, but instead tossed the basket that she held in her arms to him.

"Thanks. I thought about making that our lunch, but I'll give it to you. Be thankful."

Even though she had a bad manner of speaking from her pushy disposition, he somehow didn't hate her.

Since she had thrown it to him, he couldn't throw it back, and the neck of the horse slowly returned.

The two were beginning to run.

He thought that he had to say something. But what, what indeed? Was thanking them good, was wishing them a safe travel good, or was it a good idea for him to swear at them just once? They seemed to have left while he was hesitating – as a result of him being under pressure, a foolish question left his lips.

Hey, tell me your name.

Stopping the horse, the man looked back slightly,
"I won't tell you my name. So, is just my family name fine?"

And, making sure that they had left-.

Ziadrene opened the cloth which covered the basket with an indescribable feeling.

There was bread in it. Hesitating to throw it away, he ate it because he was hungry. It was strangely sweet, and walnuts had been kneaded into it. He remembered that it was a flavour that generally wasn't eaten around that area. He later learned that it was a seasoning characteristic to west of the imperial capital, of Preadone.



"What the fuck are you doing? I'm fucking struggling in the face of death!"

While he shouted that – he thought.

That he, ultimately, wouldn't know what would become of that man and woman.

Did they peacefully reach that border village safely, did that woman survive, what happened after the man had escorted the woman?

It wasn't that he didn't mind it, but he didn't think to investigate it.

But, he could even now not forget the name which he had been told over twenty years ago.

And, even after more than twenty years had passed – now that he was able to indirectly know of their end, he thought that it was fate. If it was said that such a thing was nothing more than a coincidence, he would have no words to counter that.

However, if that “simple coincidence”, the echo of what was called fate which he was given, were to appear, wouldn’t it become something like a reason which encouraged his body which had resigned itself to the future, lost its youth, and been tainted in anguish?

“Go, boy!”

The situation, and his circumstances, were both different from that time twenty years or so ago.

Twenty years or so ago, if he were to know the name of that person from the beginning – he perhaps would have shouted at that leaving man’s back, while worrying about their pursuers.

“Leave it to me afterwards... Haimatie!”



In terms of time, it had taken less than five seconds.

The human, which had forced his way into the battle, was so weak that he wasn’t even an opponent to Ji Dig Endveil. No matter the degree of physical strength he had in his muscular, large build, he didn’t even deserve to be a threat as he couldn’t use organic necromancy.

However, that perception had lead to defeat.

It was not that he was careless. It was not that he looked down on him. It was not that he had lost focus. However, Ji Dig, who had perceived his opponent to be “that kind of person”, had suffered an embarrassing defeat.

It didn’t matter that the Elven woman had backed that person. Even if it was

unexpected that his mystical sword's blades was stopped, he could simply hit hard if he didn't die already. That was the power that Ji Dig had. In reality, he had felt the sensation of his bones breaking, his flesh crushing, and that of a few of his organs exploding.

The problem was – that the man had challenged him with the resolution to not fall. And, putting his life on the line for the sole act of preventing him from leaving.

He pierced his sword into the back of the man who clung to him, trying to not let him go. Even as the spirit energy was obstructed by the barrier, he put his strength into it, and forcibly thrust. The man finally fell down, raising his voice in a groan. While he didn't pierce his heart, Ji Dig was neither able to confirm his life or death, nor give him the coup de grace.

He turned his back to the man, while neutralizing the toxins which he had breathed in with an evocation.

The problem wasn't that. He had earned less than five seconds. If that boy had released Ellis during those mere five seconds, it would be a problem – he impatiently turned his gaze toward Ellis' direction.

“...fuh.”

Without thinking, Ji Dig sighed a sigh of relief.

Ellis was still bound up.

Dierich's corpse was tightly covered by plant vines, so that he couldn't even see his skin anymore. Strengthening the restraints to be as sure as could be, he bundled the vines together with the corpse as a core, in order to create a green cross.

Her body, which was crucified and rendered immobile, was not easy to loosen.

The bit that she chewed on was cut off, but that was it. That was probably the best he could do in under five seconds. After all, those mere five seconds were still but a postponement where only that much could be done.

“That was a futile struggle. It seems that there wasn't enough time to tear that open.”

It was no different from suffering an embarrassing defeat. He had to focus his mind so that no more of that would happen again. In the midst of reflecting, Ji Dig prepared his

sword.

However-,

“Futile, you say?”

The boy – Imina,

“Fuck off. Like Ziadrene’s resolution... That great act, was futile.”

Turning only his head at him, he spat, with a low voice.

After that, he turned around,

“I’ve left you waiting, Ellis.”

Ellis nodded. Nodding,

“Yes, Imina... Come back to me.”

Happily laughing-.

Ji Dig doubted his eyes at the actions which followed during the next instant.

Imina thrust the crimson sword, which he clasped in his right hand, into Ellis’ stomach. Ellis’ stomach accepted the blade without resisting it, plunging the sword blade inside her body.

“Wha,...!?”

The two were exchanging kisses in that state. As if it were a ceremony. As if it were a final farewell. And yet, as if they were a pair of lovers, delighted at their reunion.

“You people, what... what the fuck are you doing!”

In front of his blood relative, who was assaulted through the blade and her lips at the same time, Ji Dig felt a reflexive fury.

At the same time, he understood what that chain of acts meant.

The sword which the boy used had the peculiarity that it absorbed and stockpiled spirit energy. It was a power which resembled Ellis' blood, which held an unique evocation with a special trait. And, the colour of that sword blade was like blood.

The boy which was the user of that sword should have died on that occasion four years ago. However, he had been revived through Ellis' evocation, and was standing there. His body should have received protection from Ellis.

In that case, the act of piercing his sword through Ellis' stomach, and laying his lips on hers-.

Imina looked back.

“What the fuck are you doing, you say?”



He had already pulled out his sword.

And then, dark-red sparks scattered from all parts of his body. The dense spirit energy which ran about his body saturated, and mixed with his blood, which created a phenomenon of spiritual ionization.

The boy sneered. Ruthlessly, brutally, gladly.

“I haven’t done anything yet... What I’m doing, starts from here.”

With a thud – Ellis’ body, which had been crucified, fell to the ground, liberated.

The green cross, behind Ellis who crouched, breathing deeply, crumbled. The bundled vines withered and turned pale, and Dierich’s corpse fell with a thump as if it were a stick.

“Ridiculous!”

That cross was created through infusing it with spirit energy, through “Army Crusher”.

It was intrinsically impossible for it to be disintegrated if it lay contrary to Ji Dig’s will. In the situation where it obeyed his orders, it should have simply continued to exist – as long as the spirit path connected it with him.

Panicking, he fumbled for his own spirit energy. He could not feel the connection. The spirit path had been severed.

“...You don’t say.”

Had the boy snatched away the inherent spirit energy of the spirit path so much that it couldn’t be maintained anymore? During only that single instant that he had pierced the sword into Ellis.

“There’s no time. Therefore I’ll do my best with all my power.”

Imina glanced at the crouching Ellis.

Ellis seemed to suffer. While it seemed that the wound in her stomach already had been healed through an evocation, it seemed that she was extremely spiritually fatigued for that reason. It was because the quantity of her spirit energy wasn’t large

my nature. The exhaustion of her “Common Technique” – the special spiritual characteristics that her blood held, which were unique to an outlandish degree, was proportional to the utilized quantity and time.

There was no hesitation at all in Imina’s proclamation, whether he knew or not.

Ellis too, disregarding her physical condition, nodded.

“It’s fine, Imina... Do what you like.”

Rather, with a happy face.

“Exellis’...”

Raising his sword, the boy muttered. That seemed to be the name of the sword.

The object made from Ellis – Exellis.

“...Gooo!”

With his shout.

A boom.

The crimson blade burst open.

Releasing Ellis’ blood, which had been compressed and solidified into the shape of a sword’s – it returned to its original shape.

The blood displayed a peristaltic movement, as though it had become a soft-bodied creature, with the handle as its scaffold. And, the tip diverged into several things that could be either ropes or tentacles, each of them extending in a different direction.

Like a spider spread its legs.

Like a tree grew its branches.

As cracks broke a wall.

Ahead of where the spider’s legs, the grown branches, the tips of the cracks, were

headed to,

“No way....!?”

Were ten-odd corpse-demons, which Ji Dig had prepared to assault the humans.

They were useful tools which moved autonomously, obeying simple orders, but in exchange for that they had no mind and moved slowly, having no concept of avoiding attacks. Not able to understand what was happening, they received the “Crimson-Stained Water Lily” – in their heads, in their bellies, and in their shoulders, successively.

“GU, OOOH, OH...”

He unconsciously bent over from the discomfort of the spirit paths forcibly being torn to pieces. Unlike the cross just before, this time it was more than ten of them. It was as if his spinal fluid was churning up.

Losing their control, the corpse-demons began to collapse one after another. Even though they were supposed to be dolls which didn’t cease their movements unless they were cropped into small pieces, they turned back to mere corpses after only one stab.

Before long, none of the corpse-demons moved; Imina glanced at the people, which dumbfounded stood shock still viewing that scene, and quietly ordered the sword.

“...Return.”

With a boink.

Drawing the reverse of the exact same trajectory as when it burst open – the “Crimson-Stained Water Lily” once again converged into the shape of a sword. The mass that seemed to be about three bathtubs’ worth when it was released, was compressed into the volume of a Falchion which could be used with one hand.

What was different from just before that, was that light followed the sword blade in a dazzling glow.

That was spirit energy.

It had absorbed and consumed everything from the time when Ji Dig had used “Army

Crusher" and drawn that spirit energy up through the spirit vein in order to manipulate the corpse-demons and the cross.

The light wasn't just dazzling. It twined around the sword in a form which resembled a ripple-esque whirlpool. The greatly concentrated spirit energy surpassed the light's wavelength, and changed into semi-matter.

"You bastard, what..."

Ji Dig unintentionally cried out, dumbfounded at the strange sight.

"So you bastards... created such a thing! Do you understand just how fearsome it is, and how much you have gone too far!?"

The ability to usurp spirit energy, disregarding other people's control.

And, the ability to store the usurped spirit energy in large quantities.

If there were only a drop or so of Ellis' blood, it wouldn't be much of a problem. Even if it were to use every single drop of blood in her body, it would still not be such a threat.

However, just how much blood was used for that sword?

Supposing that three bathtubs' worth of it were used, how many times of the blood in Ellis' body would it amount to?

150 times, 200 times, or possibly even higher?

He wondered how much spirit energy it was able to usurp, and store away.

For just how many years had she continued to draw out blood until being on the verge of dying from blood loss, in order to gather such an amount?

It was the repulsiveness of that persistence, of that idea, and of that deed.

"...Has it become a matter for the Elders to worry about?"

He spoke.

The spiritual trait which dwelled within Ellis tainted the water lilies with blood. Therefore, "Crimson-Stained Water Lily". Never to be used without permission, it was the power of the Demon, which could destroy the Tribe.

Still, Ji Dig believed in his niece. He laughed at the anxiety of the Elders. Saying that she was a gentle girl, which definitely never would do those things, never even thinking about the ruin of her tribe.

It seemed that it was a miscalculation of his.

"That kindness of yours will certainly not become an enemy, right?"

She had sinned precisely because she was kind.

Due to her kindness, she loved people, going against her tribe, and had created such a thing-.

"An enemy? That is my line."

The boy which carried a sword glared at Ji Dig.

"If you are an enemy, you are an enemy. You snatched away my... Ellis' important things. Therefore we are here now. Therefore, we possess this sword."

—I see.

Ji Dig tightened his lips.

They were not the only ones which had sinned. Had his side too not gone astray four years ago?

Ji Dig was thankful for Shirjis' choice. He had even praised it to surely be linked to the Endveil clan's prosperity.

However, for the clan – no, for the entire elven tribe, the current existence of that boy and girl was not a road to prosperity, but to downfall. In any case, those two would positively bring despair to the elven tribe. What would Shirjis think when he knew about it?

His true feelings were – yes, my nephew – his older brother's posthumous child – even if he loved humans and his younger sister just as much as the clan.

Ji Dig readied a posture, aiming at the eye, with his mystical sword.

“...Even still, I will stick to my own moral law. I won’t allow you to keep on living here.”

Even the boy, who was held captive by revenge, sipping the blood of his beloved partner.

Even the girl, which was held captive by the boy, her blood gathered up by him.

While he found it sad, recognizing the existences of those people was tantamount of recognizing the ruin of the Elven Tribe.

He didn’t know whether he could win or not. The light from that sword would surely erase half of him with just a touch. Besides, the opponent probably was in a status similar to having applied inorganic necromancy to himself, using Ellis’ blood as an intermediary. Both his speed and equality were equal – depending on the circumstances, possibly far beyond him.

“My name... I didn’t formally give you my name, boy. My name’s Ji Dig. Ji Dig Endveil, little brother to Former Village Elder Eiis, and uncle of Shirjis, current Village Elder.”

At least I will tell him as a swordsman,

“...And?”

Far from returning his name, the boy gazed even sharper, his intent to kill overflowing.

“Why is that? Do you mean that you want to settle a duel with pleasant feelings by exchanging names? Do you want to be proud about your manner of death, as a swordsman?”

Like that, he slowly bent his knees, putting all his energy into his body.

Were the sparks of spirit energy which leapt from his body the very embodiment of fury? Was the optical vortex of spirit energy that the sword was clad in the very embodiment of resentment?

“I, see...”

Although it was too late, Ji Dig understood.

“You don’t know in what manner my mother was killed, right. You haven’t seen in what manner everyone in the village died, right? My older sister was stabbed in her back until death by the one she liked. And I was scattered into pieces as if I were a pile of broken rags.”

What he was to destroy was not that sword. It wasn’t Ellis’ evocation either.

“...We could only receive that manner of death!”

It was that boy. That boy, would surely, to him-.

Kicking the ground, Imina charged.

His speedy run was incredibly swift. His rate of elevation of his physical abilities would be close to the top, even seen from the perspective of an Elf’s evocations. In other words, he, who had applied nothing but a second-rate body-strengthening evocation didn’t appear to be an enemy at all.

“A fifty-fifty chance against me in my base state, and if I use evocations you have no chance of winning” – his chest pained at those words which he had spoken just a few minutes ago.

As a matter of fact, that was foolish.

He didn’t even have the time to raise his sword which was in the position of aiming at the eye. Neither his evasion nor defence was good enough.

Had he become weak through being unsightly up until now?

Would he lose because he simply only had added easy skills such as evocations, even though he, for over fifty years after he had been born, had trained himself in the way of the sword again and again?

That was truly unreasonable – yes, indeed. Did that boy go against him while holding that unreasonableness? Had he been fighting from there, without using organic necromancy?

“OOOOOOH!”

Along with the approaching light, he heard the young boy’s war cry.

As if it was breathing out blood, striking him with anger, his throat trembled as if it had collected all the resentment and curses in the world; it was such a voice.

His sword drew near. As the light sparkled, it converted the overwhelming spirit energy into the power of destruction.

Ji Dig finally thought of his nephew.

He recalled when he, prior to four years ago, when the previous clan elder, Eiis, still was in good health – happily spoke about his close friend who lived in a human village, where he often went to play.

He had also said that they were practising their swords together. That they were repeating an evenly-skilled, fair-and-square match where they didn't use things such as evocations, and that it was fun.

The two would probably once more see each other again. Not as comrades and friends, but as mutual enemies. Not fair-and-square without evocations, but using all means and measures in order to kill each other.

—Sorry, dear Shirjis.

The sword swung in a diagonal fashion, and the power of destruction became a torrent, firing straight ahead.

That rendered everything under the top of Ji Dig's shoulders into ash in an instant, and later also blasted away tens of metres in a fan shape, of the forest which lay behind him.

When his remaining left arm and head had dropped to the earth, Ji Dig had already expired.



Interlude

間章

森奥で笑う荒らかな

Interlude

Laughing in the Depths of the Forest, the Fierce

Thus, they became heroes after their triumphal return.

It had been six days since they had been imprisoned – inside the “Small Elven Village”, which had been inserted into the enemy’s evil plan. It was the seventh morning where everyone had resigned themselves to that they weren’t alive anymore.

Among the 108 members which had been unrepatriated and were missing of the “Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves”, twenty-five people had returned and lived to see the Great Fortress of Astzeelen once again.

Among them, Milifica Yusala Astzeelen, the Commander, was included. Even as she was sullied by mud and dust, the gallant and beautiful young princess-knight passed through the gate of the Great Fortress with twenty-four people under her, receiving excited cheering from the soldiers that greeted her. Even though fatigue was visible on her face, her dignified attitude was healthiness itself.

Of course, it was impossible to say that everyone was unhurt.

In fact, it had amounted to 83 people that had perished in battle within that forest, and even within those which had returned alive, there were severely wounded people.

Ziadrene Meindreigh, who was renowned as a part of the vanguard party, had received damage to his organs, and a skull fracture, injured so severely that it would take six months for him to recover, returning in a miserable state.

The physician had said that it was a marvel that he hadn’t died. However, his consciousness was clear, and the prognosis was not all too bad. Setting aside whether he would be able to fight as before, ha had been saved from a discharge due to injuries.

One of the Assistant Commanders, Ellis Ivy, had become unconscious due to exhaustion, and was placed on a horse. Although she had no external wounds, she had continued to sleep for three days and three nights – while she was slightly weak after she had awoken, it seemed that she would completely recover, given the passage of

time.

Those which stood out to be severely wounded were those two, but everybody more or less bore a wound.

As an answer to the other corps when all of them just had asked how in the world they were able to live in the forest for six days, there luckily was a place within the forest where the spirit energy was thinning -there was an entire area where a normal atmosphere seemed to drift, and so they dug for water, hunted animals, and camped, and somehow had managed to escape death. However, everyone stopped talking about any further details. To everyone which said that they were memories that were better off not told as stories with bitter smiles, the listeners showed restraint too, saying that it was natural.

Of course, they wouldn't become heroes by only returning alive.

The "Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves" had gained unprecedented results of war. Namely – not a Demon and not a Magical beast, but the head of one of the Elven Tribe. Killing the elves, and so forth: since the war had begun four years ago, there had still only been so many instances of doing so that they could be counted on both hands.

Anyhow, they would essentially take command from within the "Small Elven Forest", and seldom made an appearance at the front line. Besides, if they were to deal with battles, they had the fighting strength to exterminate a Company of One Hundred by themselves. Unless one possessed both luck and ability, it would be impossible to defeat one.

There were two heads.

One was the head of a young boy.

The other was the head of a man in his prime of life, who wore an eyepatch.

In particular, there were guesses that the latter had held an important position in the enemy army, a possible General.

The name of the one who felled them was called Imina Haimatie.

While obtaining two Elven heads at the same time was an unprecedented meritorious deed, he was curt.

“More than eighty people have been killed in action. Our important comrades have been exposed to a dilemma, and have been just about to die. Is there any way that that is a victory?” – murmuring those words as if spitting them out, Ellis Ivy entered the room where she slept, having always been accompanied for the three days until she had awoken.

Nonetheless, no matter her individual opinion, there was no doubt that it was a great meritorious deed.

They had received eulogies, blessings, and then, rewards, directly from General Dali Shukua Astzeelen, Supreme Commander of the Great Fortress of Astzeelen.

Milifica Yusala Astzeelen had been promoted once, from Captain to Major. In addition to that, the “Order of Chivalry of the White Wolves” had been greatly increased in personnel, becoming a regiment of more than 800 people in total. It had been reassigned from the Eighth Battalion of the Second Division of the Third Army, to become the Eighth and Ninth Regiments of the Third Division of the First Army. The name of it had been changed to pattern after Milifica’s beautiful blonde hair, to the “Order of Chivalry of the Golden Wolves”.

The one who had assumed the Vice-Commander place instead of Vice-Commander Amaïz Julieta, who recently had committed suicide – having poisoned himself, worrying about the blunder that he had committed through having left behind the Commander and her underlings – was the Assistant Commander, Sashtal Dei. After being nominated by the Commander, Imina Haimatie, and Ziadrene Meindreigh, he had received that position as a person of commoner origin at the tender age of 17.

Although, the man in question was said to be somewhat dissatisfied at receiving that honour – as though it had been forced upon him, that he had become a sacrificial goat that had it pushed upon him.

General Dali had exhausted his vocabulary in expressing his congratulations to those huge military gains.

His face was all smiles, and faintly trembled from beginning to end in delight.



The decapitated heads were preserved in alcohol, and sent to the headquarters of the front-line troops of the Elven Tribe about half a month later.

For the human society, that was a custom of the battlefield. When one had slayed the enemy and brought back their decapitated heads, it was a matter where one demonstrated their war gains and elated the fighting spirits of one's own army. Later, it was a matter where the decapitated head was to be sent to the enemy side with the meaning of a condolence call and the repose of souls, after its use had been fulfilled in letting it stand for the respect of the soul of the enemy which had fallen in a magnificent battle. That deed had its roots in the humans' spiritual sense of values where a person's soul resided in its head.

However, unfortunately – for the Elven Tribe's society, that was an extremely savage mockery.

The spiritual sense of values which the Elves held was that the soul and body both returned to the earth on that occasion. Their funeral was to let the corpses of the deceased stay left as is in the field, so that they would decay into that very earth. As the body became earth, the soul too dissolved into the Spirit Vein of the earth with no grudges nor remorse. As such, they thought about the cycle of life, and wished that the deceased would once again be born as a child of the Elves.

Therefore, as fiddling with a corpse was absurd, preserving the head in alcohol – was nothing but an unpleasant custom from the savage tribe which neither to send them back to the earth, nor know the logic of the great Spirit Veins.

However, looking from the humans' point of view, the Elves' customs were impolite too. Taking no notice of the dead people and letting them become all weather-beaten, seemed to only be evidence that they did not pay any respect at all to the people's souls. In other words, the humans thought that they not only had been killed by the Elves, but also continuously insulted by them, for the last four years. Regardless of sending over their heads, what had been handed over was a manifestation of their pride: that they "definitely were better than you bastards".

In short – the humans built tombs, and the elves didn't build tombs. That difference was everything.

Having ruined the relation of nonaggression which they had held for a long time, the two, even though they were close by, held a strange sense of distance as if to say that they were two neighbouring houses with differing minds, unable to mutually understand the trivial differences between them.

In any case, the decapitated head which had been sent out, exasperated the Elven Tribe's Front Maintenance Forces.

The anger particularly intensified from the Endveil clan's side. Wouldn't that be natural? Because both the people killed in action were warriors which had held the clan name of Endveil.

On one side was Dierich Finiendveil. He had been a young man which hadn't even become twenty. He excelled at finely controlling the vegetation even though he hadn't yet been granted a Common Name, and he had fulfilled a great contribution to the creation and maintenance of the "Small Elven Village" – their front-line base.

On the other side, was Ji Dig Endveil. His death had especially brought surprise and sorrow to his fellow Clan brethren. The reason for that was because Ji Dig was one of the people in the Clan House, the younger brother of Eiis, the former Clan Elder, because he was a trusted confidant of the current Clan Elder Shirjis, and because he was a dexterous swordsman whose name was known even in the other Clans – because his existence was one of a tough yet kind protecting hand, which everybody in the Clan idolized.

The two heads were immediately taken out from the glass bottles, and buried in the forest. Despite that letting the corpses rot in distant soil was a pitiful thing which they surely would regret, all soldiers which bore the clan name of Endveil deepened the resentment toward the humans as they lamented.



And, night fell.

It had been about half a month since Ji Dig and Dierich had been buried.

The sun was already in zenith, and the distant howling of the demons and magical beasts couldn't be heard. The soldiers rested against the fight that would come the day after, and the neighbourhood was so deadly silent that one's ears hurt.

Deep inside the forest, the Staff Officer tent of the Elven Army Frontline Troops.

The young man seated in the chair calmly closed his eyes while hitting the commander's desk with his elbow.

The sense of loss exceeded the anger to the humans by far.

Ji Dig Endveil – what an existence hasn't he been to me?

Since I was born until, how much hasn't he given to me?

He was my uncle. He was what I longed to be, in becoming a swordsman. He was an object of respect. It was a tough, yet kind longing.

In lieu of his real father who, due to his role as the Clan Elder didn't care all that much about him, he had shouldered the duty of being Shirjis' father. He had played a large role in his family, especially because Shirjis' mother had died young.

After I had become the Clan Elder myself, he turned around and managed the "Six Flowers" as a faithful subordinate. He also became an advisor when I was worried. He relentlessly admonished me, not praising me with a single word of flattery.

The more he thought about it, his feelings grew stronger – Why?

Why had he lost? Although he had reached his life's prime and weakened somewhat, he was top grade in the Elven Tribe if one were to look at his sword arm. His physical strengthening due to organic necromancy was somewhat unskilled, however there were only a few people who could win over him taking that into account. If it were a human opponent, all the more.

Besides, he had "Army Crusher". Bestowed a "Common Name" by the Elders, a fearsome but reliable unique evocation which could manipulate ten-off corpses simultaneously. As its name suggested, him confronting an army and destroying it alone would be a simple thing – was the man that Ji Dig Endveil was supposed to be.

He could also recall the notice of his friend's death, which he had received about two months ago.

Kuzan Demiendveil. He was also a petal of the "Six Flowers". Top grade even if looking at the entire Elven Tribe, under just what circumstances would they suffer an

embarrassing defeat to humans?

It should have been impossible that they would lose, yet they have lost. It should have been impossible for them to die, yet they have died. That they would stop being did not even appear in my dreams. What am I to do from now on?

The more he thought, his sense of loss grew larger and larger.

Since when had he felt like that?

He couldn't remember much from when his mother had died. Then, was it since his father had died? No – wrong.

It was just a little after he had heard that his father had been killed.

Four years ago, since that time when he had destroyed that village –.

He deeply sighed. However, he felt that he would be scolded by Ji Dig if he faced down forever.

Therefore, as he raised his face, gazing at the vague shapes of the inside of the tent which had been illuminated in the candlestick's light, suddenly.

His eyes looked toward the glass bottle, which was rolling in the corner of the tent.

The heads of the two were inside it. It was a disgusting, barbarous custom, where they took their heads from the grounds of death, and finally delivered it, preserved in alcohol. Of course, he could understand that it wasn't out of ill will. It seemed to be a simple custom for them. However, he could still not accept it.

He had carelessly thrown away the bottle.

That had been him. He lacked the power to smash it into pieces.

What should I do with this? I can't just leave it as it is. However, in truth, I don't want to touch it. It would be miserable, but requesting someone to dispose of it – while thinking about that, he saw a folded piece of paper stuck to the bottom of the bottle.

He had truly not noticed it until now.

He stood up, and walked toward the glass bottle. Leaning over and bending his knee which had grown stiff because he had been in the same position for a long time, he took the paper from the bottom.

It was – a letter. It was probably a letter.

The Elves were only faintly familiar with the culture of writing letters. That was why no-one realized that such a thing could be stuck to such a place.

Instead of accompanying the bottle, instead of being affixed to the surface of it, it was quietly affixed to the bottom. He did not know what kind of aim that had. It could possibly just be a custom.

He opened the paper. A short letter was written.

Mr. Ji Dig Endveil;

Mr. Dierich Finiendveil;

We return the decapitated heads of there two aforementioned daring soldiers, with respect and condolences.

Furthermore, the one which has defeated them is—

In other words, it was a declarative statement.

The names of the heads which they had been sent, and eulogies and memorials directed toward them. In addition, a reminder that they had paid respect to their corpses and treated them carefully. Furthermore, despite that the deceased were extolled and that the bravery of the defeated was spread around, it was in truth a shrewd letter of hypocritical courtesy.

Aren't you proud of your bravery unless you do such a worthless thing?

Had Ji Dig been defeated by those people who did such worthless things?

As his chest grew full of sorrow, his eyes, which were reading a sentence, stopped. By the names of the people which had been killed, the final part which was written down.

With a thump. His heart resounded.

He thought it that he had read it wrong.

Therefore, he slowly reread it, as if following every letter by letter.

However, however many times he gazed at it, they were the same characters. The final two lines were written like that.

We return the decapitated heads of there two aforementioned daring soldiers, with respect and condolences.

Furthermore, the one which has defeated them is, the hero of the Imperial Army, Imina Haimatie.

I-mi-na.

I-mi-na, ha-i-ma-ti-e.

“Imina Haimatie”.

The young man raised his voice. Since how long ago?

He took the name in his mouth as he grew hoarse. Since four years ago.

A lie, he thought. It was someone with the same name. Because he had died four years ago. He had killed him personally. Finished him off with those hands of his. He still fully remembered, in his hands and his sword, the sensation of sending his arms flying, the sensation of his feet being lost, the sensation of cutting open his stomach, the sensation of penetrating his heart.

However, at the same time, there was something that suddenly reminded him.

No way – surely not.

“Ellis, is it...?”

His sister, who since that day four years ago had been nowhere to be found in the village.

It was understandable that she had run away. Because while he had betrayed them, he had betrayed her at the same time. It would undoubtedly be unbearable for his younger sister, who loved humans, and who loved that guy, for it to end in that way. Therefore, she had left the village, casting away him and the others in the process.

Surely she was living somewhere far away, living on while having forgotten everything – thinking that, he spoke to the people who surrounded him, saying “I think that she must be dead”.

He had no intention to look for her. He could not do such a cruel action as to bring her back. Therefore, the only thing that he hoped for was that she was living safe and sound.

What if that imagination was far too sweet?

She loved that guy more than what Shirjis thought.

She could not accept that that guy was dead, and that the one to kill him had been her older brother.

And, what if she had performed that forbidden act?

What if she, on that day four years ago, had left for the village after he and the others had gone back, and gathered the corpse of him who just had died, and succeeded in using her own blood to perform the forbidden art – distributing her blood which had an unique spiritual quality and circulating spirit energy throughout his entire body, to secure his life which should have expired?

As he said that, everything was consistent.

It would be impossible for there to be a human who could bring down Kuzan. It would be impossible for there to be a human to kill Ji Dig. And if there was one – which held the power to fight Elves, if there was a human which could stop him – that was only one person.

Apart from him, there would be no-one else.

“Imina... Imina.”

He called his name. Twice, thrice.

“Imina. Imina, Imina, Imina... Imina!”

As he repeated it four, five, six times, his tone of voice unawares became excited, and became cheerful.

As if he was shouting the name of a lover, the young man – Shirjis Endveil, laughed.

“No way... you? Why the hell, why... why are you here? Why have you come about this time to stop me? Why? Why, Imina!”

Just as much as it was reasonable for it to flow blood when one was injured, his tears overflowed as his emotions were saturated. Even so, his mouth smiled, and he didn’t cease smiling. He couldn’t stop.

Imina. His former friend. He, who he had not been able to stop him on that night four years ago – the night when they had duelled. Therefore, as a farewell, the guy which he had killed with his own hands.

In other words, that guy which led Shirjis onto the path that he now followed.

Was now chasing him, and trying to stop him this time.

And, had killed people important to Shirjis. Snatched them away from Shirjis. He had killed his uncle and confidant Ji Dig – and his friend, Kuzan. They had been felled, by him.

“Ah, I see... Thaat’s what happened.”

Shirjis finally understood.

That he was experiencing the same feelings now which he had made that guy experience four years ago. Him killing Ji Dig and Kuzan was entirely the same act as when Shirjis had killed Uruha, Lill, and everyone in the village.

That guy was now making him bear the same feelings as he had made him bear.

If that is the case – that guy surely hates me an extraordinary amount. Hating me enough that it is insufficient even as he kills, kills, and kills again. He hates me so much that he doesn’t only want to kill me, but also everybody around me until they run out. He hates me, he hates me, he wants to see me, he wants to see me – he’s yearning for me.

Just like me.

“Kuku, ku... Ku, haha, hahah!”

Before he was aware of it, Shirjis laughed loudly.

His voice escaped his throat without him even noticing. It felt pleasant. It felt like the most pleasant thing of all. The pleasantness of that annoyance and hatefulness, those curses and that resentment was tremendous.

Finally, he thought.

Shirjis and Imina were now one and the same existence. Harbouring the same thoughts, the same intent to kill in their chests, having the exact same objective to avenge themselves by killing their enemies, and mutually wanting to kill each other, they were truly the same.

In other words, ten-odd years since they had met, and four years since he had been killed – Shirjis had finally become a close friend to Imina. Become close friends, in the true sense of the word.

“Hahahaha, ahahahahaha!”

Shirjis kept on laughing.

The letter in his palm, he continued to laugh with all his heart as he continued to trace Imina's name with his fingers over and over again.

He waited eagerly for the day where they where he would meet him again. He dreamed about the day where they would kill each other.



Their situation was mutual. He did not know when it would happen. However, did that matter? He could wait. He could continue to wait. If he were to wait, that day would surely come one day.

As their friendship was firmly, mutually bound together, it would surely invite both of them to the same place one day.

Afterword

Because the place of employment seems to be my home for this work, I feel that I am becoming a shut-in.

As I won't go out for weeks, let alone months, as I lose focus, I have gone out on a walk to both reduce my lack of exercise and think about my manuscript, as if to say that enough is enough. However, if you take a walk in this day and age, families with small children can especially be alerted if an adult male loiters around the entire neighbourhood during daytime on a weekday, creating a problem. For this reason, I wander around when I don't meet people, such as late at night or at dawn.

Since it would be unbearable to be hit by a car, my course is mostly the deserted riverside area. Nevertheless, you may encounter someone walking in a similar manner once every three or four days. Because I wordlessly pass the other person without exchanging greetings, I feel tense. Of course, seeing as the river side doesn't even have street lights, one can't even see the other people's faces.

No, rather than faces, I can recognise them as nothing but faint, blurry shadows. I have written that they are, however I wonder if what I think to be "Human-sized shadows" sure enough truly is of people. I have recently noticed that there is a graveyard in the middle of my course.

These are two volumes of "Senketsu no Elf" written while thinking about that, as I take my healthy strolls.

(Setting aside the preface), I would be glad if you enjoyed them.

This time too, as they have been published, I am very grateful to a lot of people.

Mr. kona, who has been in charge of the illustrations. I am glad that I once again could see the faces of Imina, Ellis, and Milifica. I believe that they are characters which the illustrations have breathed life into. Thank you very much.

The ones in charge of editing, Mr. Satou and Mr. Hirai. I am sorry for creating a lot of work for you this time too. I will try harder so that I can proceed with my work a little smoother...

Once again, thank you very much to all the proof-readers, the designers, and once again to every departments of my publisher too.

And, even though I say that every time, more than everything, thank you to all of you readers. "I would be glad if you enjoyed them" is truly such an ordinary phrase.

However, I never use it as a stock sentence only used for flattery. If you read this book, and enjoy it even a little, I will, truly, be happy through only that.

Even though I wrote the same thing at the time of the first volume, it is a strict world where the amount sold decides whether the series can continue. In any case, anyhow, I hope to see you again in the next book.

Well then, later.



PtF by: traitorAIZEN